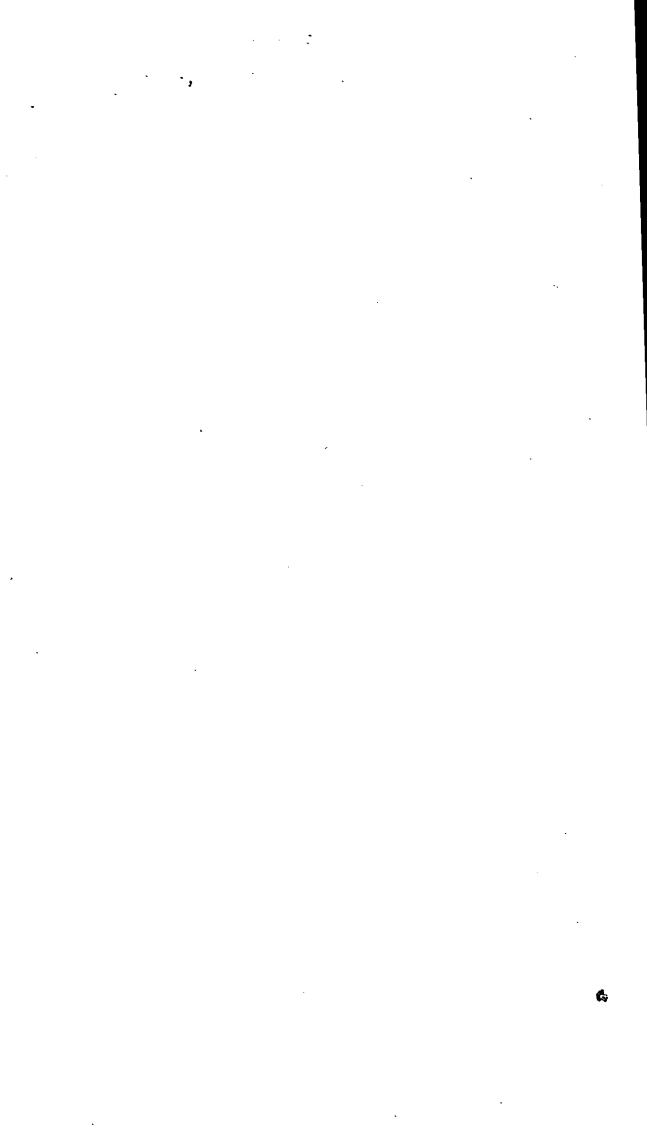


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DISCOURSES

TO

YOUNG PERSONS,

BY THE LATE

REV. JOHN CLARKE, D. D.

MINISTER OF THE FIRST CHURCH IN BOSTON.

"For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept ; line upon line, line upon line." ISALAH xxviii. 10.

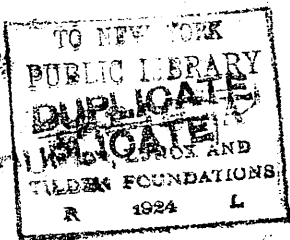
THY even thoughts with so much plainness flow,
Their sense untutored infancy may know :
Yet to such height in all that plainness wrought,
Wit may admire, and lettered pride be taught.
Easy in words thy style, in sense sublime,
On its blest steps each age and sex may rise :
'Tis like the ladder in the patriarch's dream,
Its foot on earth, its height beyond the skies. PRIOR.

B O S T O N :

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PREFACE.

SO much depends on the religious character of the rising generation, that they cannot too often be called to a consideration of their duty. Of what consequence are the graces usually acquired by genteel education, compared with rectitude of heart? What avails it, that one youth has fancy, that another is profound in meditation, and that the qualities of genius are combined in a third? The unlettered and unpolished christian, who, like his Master, *goes about doing good*, is vastly their superiour, unless to their powers of imagination, wit, and science, they add benevolence and piety.

In contrasting virtue with shining talents and fashionable accomplishments, let us not be hastily censured. We plead for religion, but not for the rigour and asperities, with which it has sometimes been associated. The importance of literature, arts, and refinement of manners is conceded. But we contend, that solicitude for these objects should be subordinate to the

the pursuit of moral worth ; and that to consume the morning of a short life in quest of any terrestrial possession, as the supreme good, is something worse than folly.

With a view to awaken in the young a just regard to the whole of their existence, the following discourses are published. They are not offered to the confirmed unbeliever, nor to the veteran in vice, because to such characters the offering would do little good.

Nor are they made publick to enhance the literary reputation of their deceased author. The distinguished merit of the late Dr. Clarke is acknowledged by all, who were honoured with his friendship, or favoured with his instructions. Even those, who dissented from him in theological opinion, united with his admirers in praise of his learning and goodness. His gentle manners, his conversation abounding in lively description and judicious remark, his wise economy of time, and the cheerfulness and fidelity with which he fulfilled his pastoral and social duties, will be long and gratefully remembered.

Of preachers he deservedly ranked in the first order. His elocution, not naturally powerful, was rendered captivating

to his habitual hearers by his known correctness, and a delivery which partook both of gravity and warmth. But the brightest excellence of Dr. Clarke, as a public instructor, consisted in the utility and taste of his pulpit compositions. He seemed to emulate the plainness of Dr. Chauncy, but to the perspicuity of his great predecessor he added a high degree of elegance. Richness and propriety of sentiment, as well as precision in style, and simplicity of method, characterize his discourses. He is there seen addressing mankind as they are ; as beings compounded of body and spirit, of passion and intellect, of ignorance and knowledge ; who, though principally attentive to sublunary affairs, do not however entirely reject religion, nor feel indifferent to its truths. To the improvement of such beings he directs his labours. He assails their understandings, sensibilities, hopes, and fears, and dexterously uses their own concessions to shake their practical skepticism, and fix their principles and build their habits on a christian foundation.

The uniformity of our author's life is visible in his writings. He wrote many sermons on most subjects, and most of his

sermons with equal felicity. It is hence difficult from what is always good to select what is best. This difficulty was said to be felt in making the former selection ; and it has embarrassed and somewhat retarded the present publication. It is at length made, and not without hope of success, to answer the expectation excited in the advertisement to the other volume ; to gratify the friends of the author's memory ; and to improve the morals of youth, and thus the customs and state of our country.

If the subsequent pages are not given to the world for the sake of decking the tomb of their writer with flowers, it is believed, that they will nowise diminish his well earned fame. The spirit, which animates other of his works, is manifest here. He well knew, that the controversies of the schools have no charms for the juvenile auditor, and that the hearing of sermons, to be followed with profit, must be attended with pleasure. These discourses accordingly are alike free from mystery, which clothes religion with terror, and from polemicks, which make it unintelligible. As will be obvious to the reader, they were written without regard

gard to order ; and they were found, as were the sermons already printed, among the author's ordinary preparations for the Lord's day. In this fact an apology is furnished, if an apology is needed, for a repetition of sentiment, which will occasionally be observed. Yet he, who reads rather for edification than amusement, will deem it a beauty instead of a blemish. Reiterated lessons are exactly adapted to the condition and wants of mankind. Men are wicked not so much through ignorance of their duty, as through the weakness or infrequency of motives to its performance. Young persons especially stand in daily need of those *goads* to right action, which are formed by *the words of the wise* ; and that these sharp and wholesome counsels should penetrate and remain fast in the heart, they must be often impressed.

Let parents hence be instructed in what they owe to themselves and their children. Let them remember, that the twig may be easily bent, but that the form and ramifications of the full-grown tree cannot be changed without violence. In imitation therefore of these discourses, let them begin with their offspring, saying, *Wisdom is the principal thing, &c.* Let them
not

not say so in words merely, but in actions ; teaching equally by example and by precept, that they consider all knowledge whatever, without the knowledge of God, as of no value, and that the industry, which has not for its object the melioration of life, is laborious trifling.

SUMMER-STREET, }
March 19, 1804. }

CONTENTS.

SERMON I.

The importance of religion.	Page 13.
<i>Wisdom is the principal thing : therefore, get wisdom.....Prov. iv. 7.</i>	

SERMON II.

The amiable youth.	30.
<i>Then Jesus, beholding him, loved him ; and said unto him, one thing thou lackest : go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor ; and thou shalt have treasure in heaven ; and come, take up the cross, and follow me. And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved ; for he had great possessions.....Mark x. 21, 22.</i>	

SERMON III.

Duty to parents.	51.
<i>Let them first learn to shew piety at home, and to requite their parents : for that is good and acceptable before God.....1 Tim. v. 4.</i>	

SERMON IV.

Benefits of parental religion.	67.
<i>When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice, and I am persuaded that is in thee also.....2 Tim. i. 5.</i>	

SERMON V.

Page

Observation of early virtue a source
of joy. 84

I rejoiced greatly, that I found of thy children walking in the truth, as we have received a commandment from the father.....2 John, v. 4.

SERMON VI.

Importance of an early knowledge of
the scriptures. 101

And that from a child, thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus.
2 Tim. iii. 15.

SERMON VII.

Reverence of the scriptures a corrective of youthful follies. 118

*Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?
by taking heed thereto according to thy word.*
Psalm cxix. 9.

SERMON VIII.

Our Creator to be remembered in
youth. 133

*Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth,
while the evil days come not, nor the years draw
nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in
them.....Eccles. xii. 1.*

SERMON IX.

Obligations to piety arising from a
religious education. 160

*Know thou the God of thy father; and serve him
with a perfect heart, and with a willing mind.*
1 Chron. xxviii. 9.

SERMON X.

Obedience to God the best method
of securing the favour of men. 176
*And Jesus increased in wisdom, and stature, and in
favour with God and man.....* Luke ii. 52.

SERMON XI.

Youthful sobriety. 193
Young men likewise exhort to be sober-minded.
Titus ii. 6.

SERMON XII.

Character of Daniel recommended to
the imitation of youth. 212
Daniel, a man greatly beloved..... Dan. x. 11.

SERMON XIII.

Means by which the young may a-
void contempt. 229
Let no man despise thy youth..... 1 Tim. iv. 12.

SERMON XIV.

Advantages of good, and disadvan-
tages of evil, company. 243
*He that walketh with wise men shall be wise ; but
a companion of fools shall be destroyed.*
Prov. xiii. 20.

SERMON XV.

The corrupting influence of evil dis-
course. 257
Evil communications corrupt good manners.
1 Cor. xv. 33.

SERMON XVI.

The progreffive nature of vice. Page 278
They proceed from evil to evil..... Jer. ix. 3.

SERMON XVII.

The period of youth the accepted time. 295
Behold, now is the accepted time ; behold, now is the day of salvation !..... 2 Cor. vi. 2.



Sermon I.

THE IMPORTANCE OF RELIGION.

PROVERBS iv. 7.

WISDOM IS THE PRINCIPAL THING :—
THEREFORE, GET WISDOM.

THE knowledge and practice of religion is, of all concerns, the most interesting to mankind. Whether we consult our honour, our peace of mind, our usefulness, or our future well-being, we cannot make a wiser choice, than that recommended by Solomon ; nor can we follow a better rule, than that which he has prescribed. The remark of the Roman orator respecting friendship will justly apply to practical religion. “ You ask for riches, that you may enjoy them ; for power, that you may be followed ; for preferment, that you may be respected ; for pleasures, that you

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The progressive nature of vice. Page 278
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may be gratified ; for health, that you may be free from pain, and have the full vigour of body. But religion comprehends many considerations. Go where you will, it is present. No place can shut it out. It is never unseasonable, never intruding. It gives splendour to prosperity, and is a cordial under adversity."

But I need not repair to the heathen schools for words to describe, or figures to embellish, the subject of religion. The words of the royal moralist will be sufficient for this purpose. "Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding. For I give you good doctrine, forsake ye not my law. Get wisdom, get understanding : forget it not, neither decline from the words of my mouth. Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee ; love her, and she shall keep thee. Wisdom is the principal thing : therefore, get wisdom : and, with all thy getting, get understanding. Exalt her, and she shall promote thee : she shall bring thee to honour, when thou dost embrace her. She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace ; and a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee." A more lovely portrait of religion never was drawn ; nor were ever its advantages better

better displayed, than in this elegant description.

The words, to which I have invited your attention, may be considered as a lesson to the young. The manner in which they are introduced, leads me to suppose that Solomon had a particular reference to them. But whether this be, or be not the fact, there can be no impropriety in such a discussion of the subject as shall be most beneficial to them, who are just entering life, and have their character to form. I am a debtor both to the aged and the young, to the high and low, the rich and poor, the learned and the simple ; to those who rejoice, and to those, who mourn. To persons of all descriptions I would wish to accommodate my public labours. But if the young are more frequently addressed than others, the infinite importance of early religion must be my apology. I can easily conceive that they, who begin well, may, as they grow in years, grow in favour both with God and man. But when the greater part of a long life has been consumed in sloth, or spent in folly and wickedness, there is little prospect of a reformation. The young mind may be compared to that "earth, which drinketh in the rain, that cometh
oft

off upon it ; and bringing forth herbs meet for them, by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God." But the mind of those, who have been long accustomed to do evil, may be likened to that ingrateful soil, "which bearing thorns and briars, is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing." If this representation be just, they, who have grown old in vice, have reason to tremble. And the young cannot be too frequently urged to "make haste, and delay not to keep the divine commandments."

In the text, a very important truth is advanced, and a plain inference is drawn from it. The *truth* is, that wisdom is the *principal thing*. And the *inference*, that we ought to get wisdom. To illustrate this remark, and justify this conclusion, shall be my business in the following discourse.

I. *First*—We learn from the text, that "*wisdom is the principal thing*." By *wisdom* we are unquestionably to understand *religion*. In this sense the word is generally used in the book of proverbs. In other parts of the sacred volume, it sometimes conveys a different idea. There are places, in which it stands for that particular kind of prudence or discretion, which enables men to see what is fit to be done, according

according to the circumstances of time, place, persons, manners, and end of doing. Quickness of invention, and dexterity in executing, are also ideas affixed to this word. Sometimes, the term, wisdom, intends human craft, cunning, or stratagem. At other times it is employed to express learning in general, or experience. In the passage before us, it must intend the knowledge and practice of religion. And, it is evidently the design of the wise man, to represent an acquaintance with religion, and a life conformable to it, as the most important of all human concerns.

The least attention to the subject will convince us of the truth and propriety of this remark. In every point of view, "religion must be the principal thing." As a pursuit, as an ornament, as a source of happiness, as a rational entertainment, as a chief, and everlasting good, it must precede all other objects and interests. To mankind nothing, in the whole compass of nature, can be of equal moment. To adopt the language of the wise preacher, "the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies, and all the things thou canst

canst desire, are not to be compared unto her." But to be more particular.

As a pursuit, religion evidently holds the first place. When employed in cultivating the understanding, and forming good habits, we appear to superiour advantage. Man is a rational agent. His moral and intellectual powers raise him far above the other beings, who inhabit this globe. He ought therefore, to be engaged in higher pursuits. Formed for the knowledge and practice of virtue, he is obliged by the very laws of his nature, to view all other concerns as of secondary importance.

Considered then, as the proper business of life, and the end for which we were created, religion is the principal thing. But it is principal, not only as a pursuit, but as an ornament. Accordingly we read, "she shall bring thee to honour, when thou dost embrace her, she shall give to thine head an ornament of grace." No one will pretend, that a serious and virtuous youth is not a truly respectable character. It is impossible not to do homage to religion, when it appears in so amiable a form. The pert, the vain, and impious, may receive certain attentions and civilities from the world. But the real respect

respect of mankind will be bestowed only where it is due. If therefore, the young are ambitious of honour, they will find religion its purest source.

Again.—So far as we regard the peace of our own minds, religion is the principal thing. “Her ways, says Solomon, are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid, yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet.” Peace is frequently mentioned as one of the present fruits of religion. Its author has said, “peace I leave with you : my peace I give unto you.” And we read, “the fruit of righteousness is peace, and the effect of it quietness, and assurance for ever.” But without these testimonies in its support, we might have argued the principle, here advanced, from the nature of religion. If we consider what is implied in the knowledge and practice of it, we must be sensible, that it cannot but ensure tranquillity of mind. The good man suffers no reproaches from his conscience. He has no reason to despise or hate himself. Though conscious of many infirmities, yet he is not sensible of any deliberate act of baseness or wickedness. His good intentions, and generally good conduct,

conduct, must therefore verify the observation of the psalmist, “ great peace have they, who love thy law, and nothing shall offend them.”

Again.—As a support in adversity, religion is the principal thing. From no source whatever can we derive such consolation as from this. To be possessed of these truths, that the world is under the wise and righteous government of God ;—that our disappointments, losses, mortifications, and trials of every kind take place by his permission or appointment ;—that they are all intended to work together for our good ;—and that they will certainly terminate in a superiour degree of glory and happiness ;—to have these impressions on our mind, is to have a charm against the evils of life. But this is the privilege of all who comprehend the principles, and feel the power of religion. To such persons it is light in the midst of darkness : ease on the bed of sickness : safety in the hour of danger : and tranquillity in times of the greatest confusion.

To proceed.—As a preparation for death, and an effectual security against its fears, religion is the principal thing. We must all die. This is a truth universally known, and acknowledged. And in some minds
it

it produces many painful apprehensions. There are persons, who, through fear of death, are all their life-time subject to bondage. And had we nothing to hope beyond the grave, we might all participate of their fears. But religion gives us a very different view of our last change. And religion only can prepare us for that interesting event. Because we have attained to a certain age ; because we have had our share of the honours, riches, or pleasures of this world ; because we have arranged our temporal affairs, and made provision for other families, it does not follow, that we are fit to die. But if we have acquired the spirit and virtues of the gospel, we are then in a state of preparation for death, whenever the Supreme Being shall call for us. Viewed in this connexion, religion therefore, must appear of the highest moment.

Finally.—Religion is the principal thing, if considered as the indispensable condition of our eternal welfare. We are most solemnly assured, that “without holiness no man can see the Lord.” And if religion or morals furnish one self-evident truth, I believe this to be such a truth. The connexion of virtue and happiness necessarily results from our moral constitution.

tution. And if any doctrine be plainly taught in the sacred volume, it is this, that if we do well we shall be accepted ; and that we shall find acceptance on no other condition. We may torture particular texts of scripture, and force them to speak a different language. We may comment on the goodness of God, and the sacrifice of his son : and may endeavour to infer from thence the future impunity of vice. We may flatter ourselves, that the threatenings of the gospel will never be executed. Still the general strain of divine revelation will be against us. And it will be our future condemnation, that we did not give credit to its testimony.

Admitting then the certainty of a future existence, and that our condition in the approaching state will be determined by our present behaviour, it must follow, that religion is the principal thing. Even were we to set aside its present advantages, this conclusion would follow. For it is religion, which must prepare us for an interview with God. It is religion, which must qualify us for the society of his beloved son, the holy angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect. It is religion, which must incline us to bear our
part

part in the services of heaven, and give us a relish for its peculiar blessedness. The joys and raptures, which the gospel teaches us to expect, must have their foundation in religion. The happiness suited to our nature as moral agents, and pure and permanent as that, after which we aspire, can proceed from no other source. Religion therefore, must be the principal thing.

Having established this point, I proceed, *Secondly*, to the duty enjoined : and that is, that we should labour to possess ourselves of the spirit ; and to practise the duties of religion. “ Get wisdom, and with all thy getting, get understanding.” If religion has been justly represented in the preceding part of this discourse, we cannot be too solicitous to understand its principles ; and habitually to feel its moral influence. To prefer the best things ; and to pursue our highest good, are dictates of common sense. No one therefore, who admits the importance of religion, will deny the inference that is drawn from it.

But perhaps you will inquire, how shall we get this wisdom ? in other words, how shall this religious character be formed ? It is granted, that no temporal interest can come in competition with the interests

interests of piety and virtue. We admit that religion is the glory of a reasonable being. And we acknowledge, that virtue must lay the foundation for solid and lasting enjoyment. Still the question returns, how are we to acquire those habits, which will ensure to us peace in this world, and eternal happiness in that which is to come? I answer, we must become wise and good, by a diligent use of those means, which God has graciously provided. In order to discharge our duty, we must seek to know it in its full extent, and in all its branches. “Thus, saith the Lord, stand in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest to your souls.” On this head, the sacred scriptures will furnish ample information. From them we may learn our duty to the Being, who made us ; to the Saviour, who died for us ; to our earthly friends and connections ; to our benefactors ; to our enemies ; to our country ; and to the world at large. The gospel likewise will teach us the duties, which more immediately respect ourselves. Alike profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and instruction in righteousness, the sacred volume claims our steady attention. And they

they who have known it from early life, have been able to say, with the psalmist, "through thy precepts, I get understanding : therefore, I hate every false way."

The first step, then, to be taken, is to examine the various rules of duty prescribed by divine revelation. Search the scriptures. Inquire what disposition of mind, and what outward actions they condemn ; and what temper and line of conduct they approve. Consider the warnings, persuasions, and arguments, which they furnish ; and weigh the motives, which they set before you. Have recourse to the scriptures frequently ; consult them impartially ; and study them diligently. And you will find, that they are able to make you wise to salvation. They may leave some unimportant speculations in darkness, but they will throw divine light on the subject of duty.

But further : to get wisdom, or, in other words, to form good habits, you would do well to receive, with meekness, the instructions of those who study your improvement ; and to take in good part their friendly reproofs and admonitions. It is observed by the wise man, that "reproofs of instruction are the way of life." Accordingly, he addresses the young and
G
inconsiderate

inconsiderate part of mankind, in the following strain.—“Hear instruction, and be wise, and refuse it not. He that refuseth instruction, despiseth his own soul : but he that heareth reproof, getteth understanding.” Those, who have gone before you in the journey of life, may be able to aid your progress. It is therefore the part of prudence to listen to their counsel.

The choice of virtuous companions is another measure wisely adapted to religious purposes. “I am, says David, a companion of them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts.” And Solomon remarks, “He that walketh with wise men, shall be wise.” The danger of evil company is universally acknowledged. That “evil communications corrupt good manners,” is an established maxim. And hence that solemn admonition, “Enter not into the path of the wicked : go not into the way of evil men : avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away.”—“For sake the foolish, and live.”

An attention to good examples will likewise tend to form and establish good habits. In the christian revelation, we are often reminded of this duty. “My brethren, says the apostle James, take the prophets,

prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example." And St. Paul says, "Be followers of them, who, through faith and patience, inherit the promises." The most engaging, and instructive of all examples is that of our blessed Saviour. He was a pattern of moral goodness in its utmost perfection. Next, the example of his immediate followers may be contemplated with advantage. The virtues of the primitive christians furnish many good lessons. And from the patterns of piety, which still exist in the world, the young may learn the dignity and importance of religion. As one of the means of practical wisdom, I must, therefore, insist on a constant attention to the good examples, which either the sacred volume, or the age may furnish.

To proceed.—The public solemnities of religion, and, more especially, the discussion of moral subjects, which has become a stated service, may be greatly subservient to the interests of virtue. Though new truths cannot be always proposed; though new discoveries are not to be expected; yet we learn something by frequenting the house of God. By hearing the advantages of religion often stated, we may learn to prize it. And by reproofs, exhortations,

exhortations, and instructions often administered, we may be led to fear God, and keep his commandments. Religious discourses may surely put us upon reflection. And if we can be only brought to reflect, there can be no great doubt of our future progress in wisdom and virtue.

Finally.—Having diligently used all other means, we should humbly repair to the blessed God for his divine support and assistance. He is the Father of lights, and Fountain of wisdom; and he giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not. Never was there a man, who wished to improve, who had not recourse to the duty of prayer. Go then to the best of beings, and let it be your language :—"Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes, and I will keep it unto the end. Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law, yea, I shall observe it with my whole heart."

Thus have I endeavoured to show by what means a wise or religious character may be formed. Convinced that religion is the principal thing, let all, but particularly the young, use every measure to obtain it. Labour for a comprehensive knowledge of your duty. Study the sacred scriptures : hear counsel, and submit to reproof : imitate good examples : reverence

erence the day, and frequent the house of God : and pray earnestly, that he would “ turn away your eyes from beholding vanity, and quicken you in his way.” Above all, set before you the example of Jesus Christ, and endeavour to walk as he walked. If you do these things, you will never fall. Growing in years, you will grow in favour with God and man. And you will realize the truth of those fair professions :—“ I love them, who love me, and they who seek me early shall find me.” *Amen.*



Sermon II.

THE AMIABLE YOUTH.

MARK x. 21, 22.

THEN JESUS, BEHOLDING HIM, LOVED HIM ; AND SAID UNTO HIM, ONE THING THOU LACKEST : GO THY WAY, SELL WHATSOEVER THOU HAST, AND GIVE TO THE POOR ; AND THOU SHALT HAVE TREASURE IN HEAVEN ; AND COME, TAKE UP THE CROSS, AND FOLLOW ME. AND HE WAS SAD AT THAT SAYING, AND WENT AWAY GRIEVED ; FOR HE HAD GREAT POSSESSIONS.

THIS is a very interesting part of scripture. The context acquaints us, that a *youth of fortune* came running to our Saviour, and kneeling before him, proposed that very important question,—“ Good Master, what shall I do, that I may inherit eternal life ? ” To which our Lord replied, “ Thou knowest the commandments ; do not commit adultery ; do not kill ; do not steal ; do not bear false witness ; defraud not ; honour thy father and mother.”

ther.” “ And he answered, and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth. *Then Jesus, beholding him, loved him ; and said unto him, One thing thou lackest : go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor ; and thou shalt have treasure in Heaven : and come, take up the cross, and follow me. And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved ; for he had great possessions.*”

There is something very engaging in this conversation, and also in the characters by which it was conducted. We behold a youth, of family and fortune, thoughtful of his soul, and seriously concerned about its eternal welfare. With pleasure we behold the delicacy of his manners and deportment ; and are powerfully attracted by the respectful language in which he addressed the Son of God. The prevailing tenour of his life and conversation makes a deep impression on us. And had he been as indifferent about his worldly possessions, as those guilty pleasures young persons too generally pursue, we should have pronounced him, a most accomplished, a perfect human character. But wealth had charms, which he was not able to resist. He could not prevail with himself to part with all, and follow Christ. He could
not

not exchange the splendour of his station for poverty, sufferings, and death. He therefore sacrificed duty to interest ;— and, for the perishable treasures of this world, forfeited those durable riches which are reserved in heaven for the righteous. This is the substance of his unhappy story, which, however, affords us many useful reflexions.

And, *first*, I would observe, the agreeable impression this youth made upon our divine Lord. *Beholding him, he loved him.* Yes, the Son of God, who was perfectly acquainted with his character, loved a youth who preferred *earth* to *heaven*, *riches* to his *soul*, and the *splendour* of *this* world to the *glory* of a *better* ! This may seem like a *paradox*, but it is undoubtedly a *matter of fact*. In the text, it is positively asserted.

But *how did he love him* ? Not surely with that ardour of affection, which he entertains for those who are wholly conformed to God, who are ready to part with all the good things of life, and even *life itself*, when called to such a sacrifice. His love was not of that kind which is excited by the true disciple. It was of an inferiour nature, and such as we often feel towards persons, who, together with innumerable

numerable faults and imperfections, possess some most amiable qualities. And this might well consist with a supreme regard for true godliness and virtue.

Without all controversy, our Lord felt a generous concern for his welfare. He was solicitous for his eternal well-being. Impressed with his amiable qualities, he wished to see them improved into christian graces, that the splendour of his worldly station might be eclipsed by the splendour of his religious character ! So much affection he certainly entertained ; as much has been exhibited by others, and less could not consist with a principle of *universal benevolence*.

But this was not all. His superiour regards were excited by the respectful behaviour of this young man, the regularity of his past life, and the rational concern he discovered for his eternal welfare. It was extraordinary, that a youth in his circumstances should be undebauched by the temptations of sense, unseduced by the syren voice of forbidden pleasure. But exposed as his situation was, he had hitherto escaped the grosser pollutions that are in the world. When the commandments were recited to him by our blessed Lord, he replied, All these have I kept from my youth

youth up. And no doubt he was sincere in this declaration. Our Lord does not charge him with falsehood, which he certainly *would* have done, had the other violated the truth on this occasion. It amounts, therefore, to a matter of fact, that this young man had led a very regular life. He had paid a respectful deference to his parents ; he had been just and honest in his dealings ; he had neither invaded the lives nor property of his neighbours ; sensual excesses he had carefully avoided ; and he had fully acted up to the part of a good citizen, and a worthy member of society. These virtues he had early discovered ; and at that time, they were his ornament and glory. Thus regular in his moral conduct, *our Lord loved him*. He was pleased to see so much wisdom and prudence in a youthful character ; and beheld him with very different eyes from those with which he regarded others, who were strangers to his good qualities.

But, *secondly*, the respect, with which this young man treated our blessed Saviour, was a further recommendation to his regards. To the utmost regularity of behaviour, he joined a most winning politeness. Perfectly acquainted with the rules of good breeding, he accosts the Son
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of God in the most respectful language. “*Good Master !*” says he, “ what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life ?” How becoming this appellation ? By calling him *Master*, he owns his authority as a *teacher*, one capable of giving him information, and authorized to do it. And, at the same time, he puts himself in the humble place of a *learner*, and professes his desire and disposition to be informed. By prefixing the title *good*, he signifies the high esteem and veneration he had for his character. No language could have been more applicable to Jesus Christ, or more becoming a young person. True it is, our Lord replied, “ Why callest thou me good ? there is none good but one, that is God.” But this was not by way of reproof ; it was only to lead up his thoughts to one, who was good in the most eminent sense of the word ; and by whose authority he then acted.

Again. Not only the language, but the *deportment* of this amiable youth was peculiarly engaging. Seeing Jesus, *he ran and kneeled* before him. This posture was expressive of his high respect for this heavenly teacher, and the humility with which he would receive instruction from his lips. Our Lord never met with so much external

nal civility, as on this occasion. Of all, who applied to him for instruction during the whole course of his ministry, we find none who behaved in so becoming a manner. And indeed it is very extraordinary, considering the splendid circumstances of this youth. Great possessions are extremely apt to intoxicate the mind, and raise a man above such modest condescension. The flattery and servile respect paid to rich men, naturally tend to deprave their hearts, and render them insolent towards their inferiours; but this youth was not corrupted by his riches. He was either deaf to the voice of flattery, or proof against it. For notwithstanding the humble appearance of our Lord, he treated him with the most engaging politeness.

Lastly.—The concern he discovered for his future state still more endeared him to our Saviour. “What shall I do, that I may inherit eternal life?” What a question! How becoming every age! How striking in a young man! Why should *he* concern himself about another world! He had every thing to make life happy! He was blest with fortune, with youth: He had the means of enjoyment. He might take his fill of pleasure, and resign himself up to sober reflexions, when capable

ble of no other felicity. Why then should he disturb himself with a dying hour, and a future state? Why depress his spirits with lessons of morality? Why think of leaving the world, and all its enjoyments, when just entered upon them?

In such strains he would now be accosted; and it is possible he was not a stranger to them at that day. Youth and fortune are seldom favourable to the interests of piety. A young person will always think the morning of life no season for the business of religion; and affluence will be ever procrastinating the hour of sober reflection. Hence it is too often the perverse language of each, "Go thy way for this time; when I have a more convenient season, I will call for thee."

How distinguished, then, the character of this youth, to think of religion, and another world, when he had so many objects to engross his attention; so many inviting pleasures to engage his pursuit! How great his fortitude, to dare the imputation of singularity, and to venture to be wise! It requires no small share of courage to rise superiour to the temptations *he* surmounted, and to act his noble part. No wonder, therefore, he appeared amiable in the eyes of our Saviour. No

wonder he regarded him with sentiments of love.

Thus have I considered the affection of our Lord for this young person, and the attractives on his part, by which it was excited. And from hence it is obvious to remark, that youth cannot appear more amiable, than by sobriety of conduct, decency of speech, and a modest and polite deportment. How agreeably are we impressed with the language and manner in which he approached our Saviour? His running, kneeling, and the title he gave him—*Good Master*—do him peculiar honour. Modesty and good breeding have charms, which few can resist. Every man of feeling and sentiment is captivated by them. They are absolutely essential to a religious character. And without them, any person (and more especially a youth) is but a superiour kind of brute. Destitute of these amiable qualities, a man may be feared, but it is impossible that he should command esteem. Roughness and ill manners excite our utmost abhorrence.

To inspire the world, therefore, with favourable ideas of us, we cannot do better than to copy the *graces* of this amiable youth. His modesty and condescension will recommend us to universal esteem ;
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and if, joined to these, we imitate his regularity of conduct, we shall be, at once, the blessing and ornament of society. In the bloom of youth, we shall exhibit the wisdom of age : and, as we proceed in life, we shall advance in favour both with God and man.

And this leads me to another observation—that a man of his character is much nearer to God, and the kingdom of heaven, than persons who are destitute of morality. I have heard it asserted, that there is more hope of the most profligate and abandoned debauchée, than of a mere moral man, one who is externally pure and righteous, who is innocent of great transgressions, and has escaped the grosser pollutions, that are in the world. But surely such a doctrine as this is not authorized from scripture. Have the advocates for it considered the consequence ? Does it not virtually make Christ a minister of sin, and his gospel an encourager of licentiousness ? Does it not involve in it this absurdity, that the old world, had it been more abandoned, might have escaped the deluge ? And that Sodom and Gomorrha were not profligate enough to be proper subjects of God's sparing mercy ?

It is an undoubted truth, that a mere external conformity to the law, an outward decency and regularity of behaviour, is no argument that a man is renewed by the Holy Ghost, and morally fit for the heavenly felicity. Something more is necessary, in order to constitute an actual right to the divine favour. He must be pure in heart, as well as pure in life. He must be formed to the moral image of his Maker ; and become, in the scripture sense of the word, a *new creature*.

Nevertheless, the nearer a man approaches to this character, the nearer he is to the favour of God, and the expected felicity of a better world. His prospects of being effectually turned from darkness to light, are much greater than those of the abandoned sinner. And in the course of things, it is highly probable, that a work of grace will be wrought upon his soul ; that his morality will ripen into evangelical obedience. Certain it is, the Saviour of the world will regard him with a favourable eye, otherwise we cannot account for his affection to this young man. For him he loved, though materially deficient in point of faith, and only distinguished for his morality, or externally good behaviour.

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Having considered the bright side of this youth, and pointed out the excellencies of his character, I now go on to shew wherein it was defective. And it appears, amid all his virtues, he retained a predominant love for the world. For Jesus said unto him, "One thing thou lackest : go thy way ; sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor ; and thou shalt have treasure in heaven : and come, take up the cross, and follow me. And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved ; for he had great possessions." I do not wonder the youth was surprized at the apparent rigour of this injunction. It was a great sacrifice for him to make. To part with those possessions, which had descended to him from his ancestors ; to resign all his wealth into the hands of the poor ; to reduce himself, at once, to a level with the meanest ; joined to all this, to embark in a cause, that must unavoidably expose him to every temporal calamity ; how natural his grief and surprize ! There are very few, even of those who make the highest professions, that are willing to part with their substance, for the honour of God, and the good of society. Wealth has charms in almost every eye ; and the Christian is not always proof against them.

However, I would not be thought to justify the youth in this part of his conduct. Though he had many good qualities, he certainly was very deficient in point of faith. He had not sufficient confidence in Christ to part with all, and follow him. He could not trust himself with the blessed Jesus, and resign himself up to that fate, which awaited his Divine Master. He, therefore, declined the proposal which was made to him ; and went away grieved at an answer so unlike his expectations.

Very different from this was the behaviour of Abraham, when put to the trial. At the divine command, he quitted his native country, his father's house, and all his connexions. He cheerfully went forth to a land he knew nothing of. Relying upon the care and protection of God, he resigned himself up to his disposal, knowing he would provide for him in such a manner, as should be for the divine glory, and his own best interest. The truth was, he had *faith*, and under the influence of that principle, he acted such an heroic part.

And in like manner, when called upon to sacrifice his son, he discovered the utmost readiness to comply with the will of heaven. He did not plead the feelings of a parent ;

a parent ; he did not object, that Isaac was the child of promise, and the basis of all his future hopes. He availed himself of none of those excuses, which it had been natural for a person in his situation to make. But, as soon as the divine will was signified to him, he took his son, and repaired to the place of sacrifice. For he thus reasoned with himself, that God would certainly perform what he promised, and would raise Isaac from the dead, rather than disappoint his expectations. He had such a faith in God, in his power and veracity, that he triumphed over obstacles, which had been insurmountable by any other person.

And had this youth been under the influence of a lively, operative faith, he would have completed his character by this last act of obedience. When commanded to sell all he had, he would instantly have done it. With cheerfulness would he have deposited the money with the poor ; and taking up his cross, he would have followed Jesus to suffering and to death. He would have rejoiced at being thought worthy to share the fate of his Divine Master. Instead of going away sorrowful and disappointed, he would have reasoned thus with himself : True, I am called to
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make a great sacrifice. The regularity of my past life, and the good qualities of which I fondly boasted, are not sufficient to entitle me to everlasting happiness. Something more is necessary, if I would be a true christian. I must give up all the wealth, upon which I have often feasted my eyes. I must strip off this fine linen, and goodly apparel. With my substance I must feed the poor; and with my wardrobe I must clothe the naked. Nor is this all, I must profess a religion the most unpopular that can be conceived. And in all probability I must seal the truth of it with my blood. This is a great sacrifice: But what am I promised in return? Treasures in heaven, which no rapacious hand can tear from me, and an inheritance in the kingdom of God. Come, then, ye poor and needy, and take my large possessions. My earthly treasures I freely resign to you. Supply your wants out of my abundance; and leave me to follow a master, who will richly compensate me for all I now resign. With the eye of faith, I see a nobler and more durable inheritance: and I am willing to make it my own, at the expence of life, and every present enjoyment. After this manner, would the young man have reasoned,

soned, had he believed in the power, mission, and grace of the Redeemer.

It certainly is a very great defect in any professing christian, to suffer the love of this world to interfere with his duty. So great are our obligations to Christ, that we are indispensably bound to sacrifice every thing at his call. We are none of his disciples, if we hold any thing dearer than him. The condition of our discipleship is, that we stand in readiness to part with every temporal enjoyment, and even life itself, when his honour, or the interest of his religion demand them at our hands. Hence that declaration of our blessed Lord, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me." And again, "He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me : and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me : and he that taketh not up his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me." In another place the language is still more emphatical. "If any man come to me, and hate not his father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after
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ter me, cannot be my disciple." Nothing could be more directly to my purpose. From these testimonies it is evident, the love of Christ should swallow up every inferior passion. In imitation of the Roman orator, we should be able to say, Dear to us are our friends, dear to us our wives and children, dear to us our country, but infinitely dearer to us our Lord and Master. Him we should prize above all other connexions. Him we should follow, and his favour we should seek in preference to them all. Whatever he professes, that man is not a disciple, who suffers any present object to dispute the empire of his heart with Jesus Christ. The sacrifice, therefore, required of this young man, is no more than the indispensable duty of christians in common. They are all bound, by their profession, to give up every comfort, to do and submit to every thing, at the call of Christ.

It appears, then, from what has been said, that *one thing he lacked*, and that very essential to a religious character. He had not faith in Christ, a confidence in his power, veracity, and goodness. He had not seen the vanity of the world, and the unsatisfying nature of its good things. He had not realized the dimness of its splendour,

glendour, the meanness of its glory, and the poverty of its abundance ! He had not just conceptions of God, Christ, religion, the heavenly world, or the value of his own soul. Hence he went away sorrowful, grieved at the demand made upon him ; and mortified that heaven could be purchased at no less expence.

As an improvement of this affecting story, let me, in the *first* place, impress upon your minds this very important truth, *that a man may have many amiable qualities, whilst he is far from the character of a true christian.* Of this, the young man in the text is a striking instance ; and many more you will find in society. How common is it to see persons modest and regular in their behaviour, upright in their dealings, chaste and temperate, and yet regardless of the duties of piety, and utterly unacquainted with Jesus Christ ? No doubt, we have each of us many in our minds, to whom this description may be truly applicable. But how mortifying it is, that so many good qualities should not be improved into christian graces ; that so many virtues should not be sanctified with the spirit of religion ! Why will such persons stop short of the christian character ? As far as they go, they are to be applauded.

applauded. Beholding their temperance, humility, justice, and external decency of behaviour, the Lord Jesus loveth them. He approves the virtues they exhibit ; and gives them a place in his affections, which he denies the sons of riot and dissipation. Would to God such persons would consider these things, and having begun well, that they would persevere. How pleasing must it be to the great Head of the church, to see them fruitful in every good work ! What joy must it give to the court of heaven ! What satisfaction to all serious minds !

Secondly.—Let me recommend it to persons in younger life, to imitate the example in the text, so far as it was approved by Jesus Christ, and was a ground of his complacency. Like him, avoid those guilty excesses, to which your time of life is peculiarly exposed, and be sober, chaste and regular in your conversation. Is there not a dignity in such behaviour ? Is it not a glory to any period of life ? If there is a character truly vile and contemptible, it is that of the mere *rake*, the stupid, senseless debauchee ! To see a person waste the morning of life in sensual excesses ; to see him dissipate his fortune, and destroy his constitution, in these criminal

inal pursuits, can there be a more humiliating sight? How must the parent blush at the thought of such descendants! How must society tremble at the prospect of such members! If either the one or the other are truly wretched, it must be, when they are witnesses of the unrestrained licentiousness of the rising generation!

To calm their fears, as well as promote your own glory and felicity, imitate the example of this young man, as far as it is worthy of your imitation. Copy his modest and winning deportment. Observe all those rules of moral conduct, by which he squared his life. And let it be your great ambition, as you grow in years, to grow in favour both with God and man. This will afford you the highest pleasure, upon reflection. And this will be a suitable preparative, for a more intimate acquaintance with Jesus Christ, in a better world.

Finally.—Let me exhort all of every age, sex and character, not to rest satisfied in any thing but those christian graces, that faith, repentance and evangelical obedience, by which only we can be rendered meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. To justice, temperance, chastity, and external regularity of manners, let us

add a sincere love to God, and faith in Jesus Christ. Because we have escaped the grosser pollutions, and have not indulged in any very criminal excesses, let us not imagine we lack nothing. But let us remember, we are materially deficient, till we are formed to the moral image of our Redeemer, and have become *new creatures*. Till renewed in the temper of our minds, and sanctified by the Holy Spirit, we are incapable of pure, rational and lasting felicity.

Wherefore, let us ask of him, who giveth to all liberally, that he would communicate to us the superiour aid of his Holy Spirit. Let us carefully improve all those means of grace, which are adapted to make us perfect in Christ Jesus. Let us not stop at any attainments we have already made, nor imagine we lack nothing while unwilling to take up our cross, and follow our Divine Master. But to our "faith, let us add virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness and charity;" then shall we be the happy objects of God's eternal love, and rejoice for ever in the tokens of his favour. *Amen.*

Sermon III.

DUTY TO PARENTS.

1. TIMOTHY, v. 4.

LET THEM FIRST LEARN TO SHEW PIETY AT HOME, AND TO REQUITE THEIR PARENTS; FOR THAT IS GOOD AND ACCEPTABLE BEFORE GOD.

OF all the duties, prescribed by the gospel, none will admit of less dispute than that of children to their earthly parents. Our obligation to love, reverence, and obey those, who have been instrumental in bringing us into existence, is one of our earliest convictions. Amid all the corruptions and infatuations of mankind, filial duty has retained its influence. "Honour thy father, and thy mother," is a law, as well with the savage as the sage,—with the infidel, as with the christian. And we may rely, that no one, who has one sentiment of gratitude, any pretension to good manners, in short, any

any thing amiable in his composition, will be habitually wanting in filial piety. An undutiful child is a monster in the moral world ; he resists one of the primitive laws of nature ; and though he may possess some showy qualities, yet we may be sure, that he has a bad heart, and that he has forfeited almost the common civilities of mankind.

Duty to parents being, therefore, so indispensably binding, we cannot wonder at the rank assigned it in the christian system of morality. In so pure and excellent a religion, as that of Jesus, we might expect to find many directions relative to filial obedience. Accordingly, we may observe that parental authority has not been overlooked by the sacred writers. They have, in the plainest language, asserted this authority ; and have enjoined submission, on the part of children, as a proper requital for favours received. This is the idea held up in the text. “ If any widow, says the apostle, have children or nephews; *let them learn first to shew piety at home ; and to requite their parents ; for that is good and acceptable before God.*”

The text leads me to consider parents in the light of benefactors, to whom a requital is due :—And to consider children

as making that requital, when they discharge the various filial duties enjoined by the gospel.

Some plain remarks on this subject will employ the following discourse.

I. *First*.—Our earthly parents are to be considered in the light of benefactors ; consequently, that some requital is due to them upon the principles of gratitude. Base is the insinuation, that parental affection is a blind instinct ; and that the gratification attending its exercise, is an ample reward. True it is, a fondness for their offspring is a powerful principle in the human kind. Nor will it be denied, that, under the influence of this principle, a parent finds the most exquisite pleasure in providing for his tender charge. But, I do not know, that the obligations of gratitude are set aside by these considerations. A good man derives some of his highest pleasures by doing good. He increases his own happiness, whenever he relieves the wants, or increases the happiness of others. But will any say, that his bounty deserves no return, or that the objects of it are under no obligation ? Let us suppose that the charitable man were accosted in this strain :—You have long been in the habits of doing good.

So far from being a burden to you to visit the widow and fatherless in their affliction, it constitutes one of the highest pleasures of your life. You take a delight in feeding the hungry, in cloathing the naked, in cheering the prisoner, and in dispensing your charity to the sons of want. You are never happier, than when employed in wiping away the tear of distress, and meliorating the condition of the wretched to the utmost of your ability. Have you then any claim on those, who are the objects of your bounty? Is not the account balanced by the happiness, which you have personally derived from acts of beneficence?—Should charity meet with this return, we should think it equally rude and unreasonable. But as unreasonable would it be to call in question, even for one moment, our obligations to our earthly parents, because *they* have found as much pleasure in conferring, as *we* in receiving favours.

It is granted, that, in the faithful discharge of parental duty, there is a noble gratification. But from hence it will not follow, that filial gratitude is a superfluous tribute. Nothing but the utmost depravity of heart can dictate this conclusion. We must be sensible, that our parents

ents are our benefactors, and that they ought to meet with a proper return. We should consider what they have done and suffered for us, since we became the objects of their care. We should consider what they have denied themselves on our account. We should consider how patiently they have borne with our infirmities, caprices, and follies. We should consider the inconveniences, to which they have cheerfully submitted, in order that the sum of our youthful enjoyments might be increased ; and that we might be qualified to enter life with honour and advantage. A review of these things must convince every person of common understanding, that a debt of gratitude is due from children to parents ; and that this debt cannot be withheld, without violating a most sacred law of nature.

I have gone, you will observe, upon the supposition, that those, who have sustained this most venerable of all human relations, have not been wanting in duty. Some, it is confessed, are an exception to this remark. There are parents, who appear to be deficient in natural affection : And there are many more, who do injustice to their children, either through carelessness, indolence, or mistaken ideas
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of tenderness. In this case, filial respect is rather a matter of decency, than of gratitude ; but where the parental duties have been conscientiously discharged, there a grateful return is justly expected.

It appears, then, that some requital is due to parents. I go on, therefore, to observe,—*Secondly*,—That this requital is made, whenever children discharge the various filial duties prescribed by the gospel. When they behave as children, they sufficiently comply with the requisition in the text. They then show piety at home ; discharge the debt of gratitude ; and do that which is good and acceptable before God.

But you will ask, what are the particular duties required of children by the gospel ? To this I answer,—affection, gratitude, reverence, submission, obedience to the just commands of their parents, and the liberal supply of their wants, should they ever stand in need of assistance. Under these heads, the whole of filial duty may be comprehended.—*First*—Children should cultivate an exalted affection for their parents. This is an obvious duty. To love them who love us, is a dictate of common justice. But the fervent affection of good parents to-

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wards their offspring is a matter of constant experience. Every day furnishes proofs of the existence and operation of this principle. It is plain, then, that children should love their parents sincerely and ardently ; and should demonstrate, by their whole behaviour, the reality of their affection. How this principle will operate, is better known than described. They, who feel as children ought to do, will always act in such a manner as will verify their filial professions ; for the dictates of pure affection are too plain to be mistaken.

Again.—In order to requite their parents, children must appear habitually grateful. I have already observed, that this is an indispensable duty. Good parents are benefactors. A child, therefore, should frequently call to mind the benefits received. He should consider the fatigue sustained in nursing and cherishing him, whilst in an infant state. He should realize the fears and anxieties, which he has occasioned. He should recollect in how many instances he has wounded the bosom of his parents, and tried their patience by his follies and perverseness. And he should remember how many proofs they have given, that his happiness
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is dearer to them than their own. These are facts ; and the child, who properly attends to them, will want no other argument in favour of gratitude. That this is included in filial piety is too plain to need any proof.

Again.—Children are bound to reverence their parents. We all know the meaning of reverence, when applied to the Deity. By this term, we intend something widely different from servile fear. We mean that principle of respect for the Supreme Being, which restrains us from taking any liberties with his name, or offering any affront to his governing authority. *A like* respect should we entertain for our earthly parents. We should feel towards them, as persons in whom the characters of protector, friend, and governour are all united. Possessed with this veneration, we shall never wound them with any appearance of neglect. We shall never offend them by an indecent familiarity. We shall never mortify them by any expression of contempt. We shall never embitter their lives by any deliberate act of disobedience. Our conduct towards them will be highly respectful, if we venerate their character and authority ; and with the idea of a parent unite that of a friend.

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Again.—A generous and patient accommodation to their infirmities and peculiarities is required of all, who stand in the relation of children. The opinions and habits of old persons and young are often widely different ; and it sometimes happens, that the gratifications of the former greatly interfere with the convenience of the latter. But still the parent ought to be gratified, though with some inconvenience on the part of the child. One or the other must give way ; and is it not evident, that youth ought to yield to age, more especially when age is dignified with the parental name and authority ? A principle of accommodation must be included in filial piety ; nor will any virtuous child think it a hardship to bear with those, who have borne so much with him.

To proceed.—To the virtues already enumerated, a child will add obedience to parents in all cases, where their authority is lawfully exercised. Filial obedience is most solemnly enjoined in the gospel. “ Children, says the apostle, obey your parents in *all* things.” This is only one, out of numberless exhortations to the same purpose. Whether we listen to Moses and the prophets, to Christ and the apostles,

apostles, we shall find, that, on this head, they all speak the same language.

But you will ask, Is obedience to parents subject to no limitations? Ought they to be blindly obeyed? In order to show piety at home, and to requite them, ought their commands, in all cases, to be a law to their children? I answer, no: cases may be conceived, in which resistance to parental authority would be an indispensable duty. Should a parent require any thing in itself unlawful, a child ought in conscience to disobey. No human authority whatever can oblige us to violate the truth, or to do an unjust action. No magistrate, no master, no parent can give a sanction to impiety, deceit, or inhumanity. Were a parent so lost to all sense of duty, as to set up his authority in opposition to that of the great God, a moment's reflection would not be necessary in order to ascertain the proper line of duty. In so plain a case, to hesitate would be itself a crime.

It appears, then, that filial obedience extends to all cases, which lie within the proper sphere of parental authority. Children should obey their parents in all things, which they may reasonably require. They are not bound to act against
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the dictates of conscience in compliance with the will of any being whatever. I will go farther : At the command of a parent, a child is not bound to form a connection, or to engage in any profession, to which he has an unconquerable aversion. I mention these cases, because some have questioned whether they did not come within the line of filial duty. But if we reflect, how much the happiness of our present existence depends upon the domestic connections which we form, and the business which we pursue, we cannot but decide very differently on this subject. Our happiness is our all ; and though we ought to bear patiently many inconveniences, in order to gratify those to whom we are under obligations, yet we can have no call to render ourselves completely miserable.

But, upon supposition parental authority be lawfully and reasonably exercised, obedience on the part of children is indispensable. They ought, in justice and gratitude, to submit to every regulation, which is not contrary to the laws of God and their country ; and every parental requisition ought to have the force of a law, unless it involve in it the sacrifice of every essential present enjoyment. But, it

is to be presumed, parents will not exercise their powers unlawfully or wantonly. We may, therefore, injoin obedience, in very general terms, as a proper return for their goodness.

Finally.—Should parents be reduced to want, children are under the most sacred obligation to provide for them ; and in such a manner as their circumstances shall permit, and decency require. It is not enough, that they have the crumbs, which fall from a plentiful table ; they may claim a comfortable support, provided their children are blest with the means.

In favour of this duty, we may produce the general consent of mankind. The heathens acknowledged its obligations, and enforced the observance of it by positive laws. There was but one case, in which it was left to the option of a child either to support or abandon his parents ; and that was, where they had neglected to inform his mind, or to introduce him to some honest employment. When parents had acted so wicked a part, they could not compel their children to maintain them. But in all other cases, the obligation remained in force.

That this is a duty under the gospel, is a point so plain, that I never heard it called

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ed in question. Had we no other evidence, than the reproof, which our Saviour addressed to the pharisees, we could have no reasonable doubts on this head. They found fault with his disciples for eating bread before they had washed. Jesus told them, that they were guilty of a much higher offence, and pointed out the particular instance. The law commanded, saying, "Honour thy father, and mother, and he that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, whosoever shall say to his father or mother, it is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me, and honour not his father and mother, he shall be free." Thus, adds our Saviour, "have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your traditions." To understand this passage, you will remember, that to *honour*, in scripture language, means to support a parent ; and this was expressly commanded by the Jewish law-giver. But these pharisees, by a mere fiction, had contrived to set aside this law. If a child would come forward and say, that he had devoted to a sacred use, that which his parents might lawfully claim, he might then leave them to perish. How many took the advantage of this fiction,

tion, it is impossible to ascertain ; for the honour of human nature, we would hope that Judea afforded few instances of such depravity. But whether it did, or did not, it is plain, from the indignation of our Saviour, that he esteemed the duty to provide for parents of eternal obligation.

The apostle Paul has likewise expressed his sentiments on this subject. “ But if any provide not for his own, especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.” These words do by no means convey the sense of the original. The apostle is here speaking of the duty of children to maintain their aged parents, should they be in want ; but, from an expression in the text, it seems, that in order to derive this benefit, the latter ought to live within the same walls with the former. But why should any stress be laid on this circumstance ? Whether a parent be of the child’s household or not, he ought to have a comfortable support. The truth is, the words are not accurately rendered ;—they should run thus :—“ But if any man provide not for his own (parents) and especially when they are of the household (i. e. of faith) he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.” According
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to this translation, the reasoning of the apostle will be conclusive. Every christian is obliged to provide for his indigent parents ; even if they are heathens, he cannot excuse himself from this duty. How indispensable then his obligation to assist them, when they unite the christian to the parental character. To desert them in this case, is to deny the faith, and behave worse than the infidel.

I have now insisted on the several duties incumbent on children ; and I would hope that all, who stand in this relation, will pay a proper attention to the subject. My young friends of this society I would earnestly exhort to show piety at home ; and to endeavour to requite those whom they must view as their best friends. This is decent, this is honourable, and it is good and acceptable before God. The Supreme Being is highly pleased with every instance of filial piety ; and he is justly offended with those who are deficient in this respect.

Be careful, then, not to incur the divine displeasure by acting a rude, ingrateful, or rebellious part towards those, whom he hath commanded you to honour. Remember your many obligations, and let it be your study to make a proper
 F 2 return.

return. Cultivate the most sincere affection, and let your actions testify the gratitude of your hearts. Let the commands of your parents be received with cheerfulness, and executed with pleasure. Consult them on all important occasions, and reverence their advice. Their failings and infirmities you must cover with the mantle of charity. And should they ever stand in need of your assistance, you must let it appear that your duty is your delight. Put yourselves in their place, consider what you should expect, then go and do likewise. Some are, at the same time, both parents and children, and they can easily make the application to themselves.

On so plain a duty it is unnecessary to enlarge. To children, therefore, I would only say, show piety at home, and requite your parents. Promoting their happiness, you will promote your own. The world will applaud your amiable and dutiful behaviour ; and should you be parents yourselves, you may hope, that the measure which you mete will be measured to you again.



Sermon IV.

BENEFITS OF PARENTAL RELIGION.

2 TIMOTHY, i. 5.

WHEN I CALL TO REMEMBRANCE THE UNFEIGNED FAITH THAT IS IN THEE, WHICH DWELT FIRST IN THY GRANDMOTHER, LOIS, AND THY MOTHER, EUNICE, AND I AM PERSUADED THAT IS IN THEE ALSO.

IT was the privilege of Timothy to have descended from persons, whose characters reflected the splendour of religion ; and whose lives were an illustration of its most sacred duties. His grandmother Lois, and his mother Eunice, were eminent for their piety. Early in life, they had instilled the principles of religion into his tender mind ; nor were their instructions and example lost upon their young charge. The evangelist had eyes to behold the charms of their virtue, and a heart not merely to receive, but to retain

retain their religious counsels. Whilst his mind was enlightened by the instructions which he heard, his ambition was excited by the actions which he saw. Hence the commendation in the text, so honourable to Timothy, and to his virtuous relations.

It is not uncommon for persons to value themselves on account of those from whom they descended. The antiquity of their families gives importance to some : others derive it from the honours which their ancestors sustained ; from the riches which they acquired ; from the company which they kept ; or the style in which they lived. But far more gratifying must it be, to trace our descent from persons who were eminent for their wisdom and virtue. To be able to reflect, that our ancestors were great and good ; that they were an ornament to human nature, and an example to the world ; that they were distinguished by their integrity, their benevolence, their devotion, their patriotism,—must be productive of the most exquisite pleasures. Happy are those, who have this foundation for a laudable pride ; and still happier they, who, whilst they glory in the reputation, are disposed to copy the virtues, of their predecessors. Of

Of this description, according to the testimony of the apostle, was the young evangelist whom he chose for his companion and friend. Timothy was himself a good man ; and he had become such, in consequence of the virtuous means employed by his near relations on the female side, and the good example displayed by them. And may not religious instructions be dispensed to as much advantage at the present time ? Is there not as much efficacy in a good example ?

In the following discourse, I shall endeavour to show the privilege enjoyed by those, whose descent and early education resemble that of Timothy : and I shall then point out the obligations resulting from circumstances so favourable to religious improvement.

First.—The children of christian parents enjoy the benefit of early instruction. They are taught, in the morning of life, to know the God of their fathers ; and to serve him with a perfect heart, and a willing mind. His sacred character is unfolded to them ; the duty of loving him supremely is earnestly inculcated ; and the consequences of disobeying him are clearly stated. They are likewise introduced to the Saviour of men ; they are
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made acquainted with the virtues which he exhibited ; with the wonders which he performed ; with the truths which he revealed ; with the rules which he prescribed ; with the sufferings which he endured ; with the cruel and ignominious punishment inflicted on him ; and with the end for which he died on the cross. His resurrection from the dead, his ascension to heaven, and his appointment to judge the world, are also explained to the young inquirer. The gospel is put into his hands ; he is taught to read it ; to meditate on its interesting truths, and to apply its salutary rules. As his mental powers gain strength, new communications are made ; and as he grows in years, he advances in the knowledge of God and religion ; of those virtues, which constitute a good character ; and of those habits, which lay a foundation for immortal happiness. Where parents are faithful, and children attentive, such are the exertions of the one, and the improvements of the other.

It is beyond a doubt, that the understanding and heart of Timothy were, in this manner, cultivated by his pious friends. Convinced of the truth and excellency of religion themselves, they would naturally

naturally be solicitous to produce the same conviction in his mind. They would reflect, that it is never too early to make good impressions ; for which reason, the elements of religion would be inculcated on their charge, and the utmost attention paid to his morals. The unfeigned faith, which was first in his friends, and afterwards in Timothy, will justify this conclusion. The religion of the former will easily account for the piety of the latter.

But the benefit of religious instruction is not the only favourable circumstance which distinguishes those, who have christian parents. At the same time, that they are taught what God is, and what their Saviour requires, measures are taken to carry the rules of religion into effect. They are conducted to the house of God ; and subjected to those salutary restraints which his day imposes. They are inspired with an early reverence for sacred seasons, and sacred things. They are led to the throne of God, and encouraged to address him as their Father in heaven. Falsehood, impiety, injustice, and unkindness are represented to them as leaving behind them the deepest disgrace, and leading to inevitable ruin. In a word, admonitions,

admonitions, exhortations, reproofs, rewards, and punishments are employed to give efficacy to instruction ; and to counteract the temptations which are in the world. Under such advantages do they begin life, whose parents resemble those primitive christians celebrated by the apostle. They have every thing necessary for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness. They are told what vices they are to avoid, what virtues they are to practise : what they have to hope, if they conduct well ; what they have to fear, if refractory, and disobedient. The most engaging representations of an invisible Parent, and an exalted Saviour, are made to them ; they are reminded of a future state, and future retribution ; and there is a constant inspection of their behaviour, in order to ascertain the effects of religious instruction. Thus are they trained up in the way they should go ; thus are they enlightened by the lessons of true wisdom ; thus animated to the performance of every good work, and to the cultivation of every christian virtue.

Secondly.—The descendants, and immediate charge, of religious persons, have the benefit of a good example. They behold
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piety and virtue carried into life. They see the operation of religious principles on the disposition of those who profess them, and on their external behaviour. This is a great privilege: for to what purpose are instructions dispensed, unless exemplified? What good effect can be produced by prescribing rules to others, unless we observe them ourselves? A contradiction of practice to profession is easily discerned: and when discovered, it defeats the best rules which can be framed, and the most earnest exhortations which can be addressed to those whom we would wish to persuade. Persons of all ages, and particularly the young, are more powerfully influenced by the example which they see, than the precepts which they hear. In respect to them, actions are far more persuasive than words. A conviction of this truth led the psalmist to say, "I will walk before my house with a perfect heart." And the same conviction led the author of our religion, and his inspired followers, to insist so earnestly upon a christian example.

And this example is a benefit enjoyed by those, who are the charge of persons as unfeignedly devout and circumspect as those to whom Timothy was indebted for

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his serious impressions. The guides of his youth practised as they taught. Describing the pleasures of religion, they could appeal to their own experience ; and insisting on its obligations, they could refer to their own actions, as a proof that they esteemed them no unreasonable abridgement of human liberty. He was, therefore, at the same time, instructed and convinced, enlightened and animated ; was shown at once, what religion requires, and what pure christianity is.

And what may not be reasonably expected from such a concurrence of principle and practice ? How improving must it be, to those who have a character yet to form, to have continually before their eyes, patterns of sobriety, moral rectitude, and piety ? How must their affections be excited by the devout homage rendered to the God of heaven, of which they will be daily witnesses ? How naturally will they be led to reverence the truth, when they observe how its laws are respected by others ? How will it incline them to govern their passions ; to be circumspect in their conversation ; to be temperate in all things ; to perform just and benevolent actions ; to be humble, meek, and condescending ; to be, and to do, what-
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ever religion requires, when their moral instructors are examples of self-government, circumspection, and evangelical obedience? God has so constituted the human mind, that objects, proposed to its imitation, should have far more influence than general rules invented for its direction. Hence precepts may be neglected, when example would be irresistible; but when the one comes in aid of the other, it is rational to hope, that the fruits of religion may be produced; and that they, who behold its sacred light, will be persuaded to glorify their Father who is in heaven.

Comparing, then, the peculiar circumstances of different persons; the advantages with which some, and the disadvantages under which others, begin life, with how much reason may those be congratulated who have been early taught the duties of religion, and who have been familiar with none but the best examples? Of such it is strictly true, that their "lines have fallen to them in pleasant places." Whilst the minds of others have been neglected, theirs have been cultivated and enriched. Whilst others have made themselves vile, without being reprov'd, they have been impressed with the evil of sin,

fin, and terrified with its consequences. Whilst impiety and dishonesty, intemperance and malevolence, impurity and licentiousness, have been the first objects presented to others, their eyes have beheld the angel form of religion ; and their ears have heard only those virtuous communications which produce good manners. At a time of life, when most susceptible of impressions, they have seen nothing to divert them from its duties, but every thing to inspire them with reverence, and excite them to obedience ! In point of privilege, they have, therefore, been raised to heaven ; for which reason, a solemn account will be exacted of them at the great day.

Having pointed out the singular advantages enjoyed by those, who have been taught the principles and duties of religion ; and have seen them carried into practice,—I proceed, *Secondly*, to the obligation resulting from circumstances so favourable to moral improvement. And how certain is it, that they who are thus distinguished by the goodness of God, will be without excuse, if they do not behave as much better than others, as they have been more highly favoured ! Timothy, so justly commended in the text, was a cred-

it to his instructors. In early life, he appeared sober and virtuous, because he had listened to the guides of his youth ; had treasured up their religious communications ; and followed their steps. And every person, favoured as he was, should make the same return to his virtuous friends. He should remember how he has received, and what he has heard ; he should apply the warnings, reproofs, and instructions, which have been given to him ; he should examine his temper and general behaviour, and see how far they conform to the wise and good counsels which have been addressed to him ; and he should particularly inquire whether he has followed his instructors, in those respects in which they were followers of Christ. The obligation to *do* as he has seen and heard, is indispensable : It necessarily results from the situation in which the indulgent providence of God has placed him.

Hence, the peculiar strain in which Solomon was addressed by his expiring parent : “ My son, know thou the God of thy fathers, and serve him with a perfect heart and a willing mind ; if thou seek him, he will be found of thee ; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off

for ever." Hence, likewise, the language of Solomon himself ; " My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother. Bind them continually upon thy heart, and tie them about thy neck ; when thou goest, it shall lead thee ; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee ; and when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee. For the commandment is a lamp and the law a light, and reproofs of instruction are the way of life." Those remarks are perfectly just ; and they show how incumbent it is on all, who, in the character of the parent, behold that of the christian, to be patterns of moral rectitude, and early piety.

To make no improvement under such advantages is highly criminal, and basely ingrateful. The guilt contracted by those, who hear instructions, and behold examples of religion, without attending to the one, or following the other, may be inferred from the testimony of our Saviour against the thoughtless and disobedient of his own age. He denounces the utmost displeasure of God against those persons, who had enjoyed a large share of his labours, but among whom they had been ineffectual. He observes, that they had been raised to heaven ; but that they
should

should be brought down to hell. And one article of accusation against the Jews was this, that they had forsaken the God of their fathers. It is particularly expected, and solemnly required, by the moral Governour of the world, that they who have been early taught the way of righteousness should not turn from the holy commandment. For such persons to forsake the statutes and judgments of the Lord, is to act against the strongest convictions of duty ; and consequently to expose themselves to the utmost displeasure of their Maker. They are without excuse, because their disobedience does not arise from ignorance ; does not proceed from the want of motives to be good, or the want of examples of moral goodness ; but from perverseness, and a stubborn contempt of the divine authority.

They, who act vitiously, under all the advantages which I have described, may be likewise charged with the basest ingratitude. Persons, who have a strong confidence in the truth of religion, and a profound respect for its duties, cannot be more gratified, than by beholding the fruit of their labours. The apostle John has admirably expressed the sentiments of
every

every christian parent, and religious instructor : “ I have no greater joy, than to hear that my children walk in the truth.” And how expressive are the words of the wise man of what many others have experienced : “ My son, if thy heart be wise, my heart shall rejoice, even mine : yea, my reins shall be glad, when thy lips speak right things.” Considering the interest which persons of real principle and religion take in the virtuous improvements of their offspring, how can they be more wounded than by seeing the inefficacy of their labours ? Is it not, then, as ingrateful as it is criminal, in those who descended from them, to despise instruction, and rebel against reproof ?

Further :—It deserves consideration, whether a departure from the commandment early delivered, does not involve a reflection on our religious ancestors ; or encourage a suggestion to their disadvantage ? Is it not virtually an insinuation that they were not in private what they appeared to be in publick ; and that they were undeserving of the character which they had assumed ? In plain words, when the children of parents reputed virtuous, become licentious and profligate, do they
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not in effect tell the world that they esteem their progenitors either very weak, or very insincere? Though their tongues may be silent, yet do not their actions utter this calumny? They, who would resent such an insinuation if it proceeded from any other quarter, should be careful not to encourage it by their own behaviour.

The subject of this discourse deserves the serious attention of all who are called either to administer, or to receive, instruction. It reminds the parent of his duty to those who look up to him for religious information, and for a pattern of those moral excellencies which are the glory of human nature. Every person, who consecrates his offspring to the great God, whether it be done before few or many witnesses, does, with all the solemnity of an oath, declare himself a believer of the christian religion. He, likewise, swears to the God of heaven, that he will educate his charge in its principles and duties. What, then, must be the future consequence of setting light by that religion; and so far from teaching them to reverence, teaching them to despise it? Can any perjury be compared with this? Will any part of human conduct, at the
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great day, be less capable of justification, than that which I have now mentioned ?

The thought of that tribunal, before which we must all appear, should lead every one, particularly every parent, to inquire what example he has set ; and how he has discharged the duties of his station. We may make light of a future account ; but we are guilty of madness in so doing. To stand charged of having neglected a most solemn duty, of having violated a most sacred promise, of having been wanting in natural affection, must fill us with horror, even in contemplation. Wherefore, to avoid the reality, let those, who have engaged to maintain the truth of religion, and to promote its influence in the hearts of those, whom God has committed to their care, be faithful both to him, and to them. So may they reasonably hope that their immediate descendants may be an honour to them, and a monument of their fidelity.

They, who are destined to receive instruction, should also recollect the subject of this discourse ; and make the solemn application to themselves. They should be grateful to God, through whose good providence, they have the means of acquiring christian knowledge, and learning

ing the will and designs of their Maker. It should be their serious concern to become eminent for those virtues, which Timothy displayed in early life, and which were the fruits of faith unfeigned. A sense of honour, gratitude, and filial piety, should unite their influence ; and should incline them to conform with cheerfulness to the laws of religion. If religion is of any consequence, it is never too early to commence an acquaintance with it. We cannot too soon examine its doctrines and precepts ; and come to a fixed determination, whilst we believe the one, to obey the other. To you, therefore, who have, from early life, heard of the blessed God ; to you who have been informed of his goodness, and have experienced his mercy ; to you who have heard of the love of Christ, and the salvation purchased by his death ; to you who have heard his precepts recited, and his character described, let my counsel be acceptable. As you have heard and seen, do, and the God of peace shall be with you. *Amen.*

Sermon V.

OBSERVATION OF EARLY VIRTUE A SOURCE OF JOY.

2 JOHN, v. 4.

I REJOICED GREATLY, THAT I FOUND OF THY CHILDREN WALKING IN THE TRUTH, AS WE HAVE RECEIVED A COMMANDMENT FROM THE FATHER.

VIRTUE in early life is peculiarly engaging. When young persons take a serious turn, I know of nothing that so endears them to their friends, and excites such flattering expectations in all who are acquainted with their character. And to a parent I cannot conceive of a higher gratification than to *see his children walking in the truth*. Some there are, who have been so greatly favoured; such was the elect lady, to whom this epistle was addressed. This venerable christian was not only a remarkable instance

stance of piety herself, but she was blessed with children who had imbibed her spirit, and were followers of her example. The apostle therefore congratulates her on the occasion. He assures her, that the temper and behaviour of her children gave him sensible pleasure. He was glad for her sake, for their's, for his own, and on account of his Master, that they discovered such early signs of religion. “*I rejoiced greatly (says he) that I found thy children walking in the truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father.*”

In discoursing upon these words, I shall—*First*—consider the gospel under the general description of the *truth*. *Secondly*—inquire what we are to understand by *walking in the truth*. *Thirdly*—endeavour to show that this is not incompetent to the age and capacity of young persons. *Fourthly*—insist upon the fact, by referring to instances of early piety. *Fifthly*—inquire by what means the young mind may be formed to religion. And, *Finally*—the exquisite pleasure it must give to their parents, connexions, friends, and indeed all, who have the interests of religion at heart, to see young persons such an exception to the follies and vanities of the age.

First—I am to consider the gospel under the general idea of *truth* ; for it is to the christian religion the apostle undoubtedly refers in this place ; and very few words are necessary to show the propriety of this term. The gospel is the truth, because it contains a divine revelation. All nations of the earth have their sacred books ; but excepting those of Jews and christians, they are manifestly an imposture. Upon examination, there appear such evident marks of human contrivance, that no person can seriously question their original. What is said of their idols may be applied to the sacred books of heathen nations ; “ They are vanity and a lie. They, who made them, are like unto them, and so is every one who has any faith in them.” But the gospel is eminently the *truth* ; it is a revelation of the true God ; it instructs us in his true character, will, and designs respecting the human race ; it points out the true way to acceptance and salvation ; it exhibits a true and rational system of faith and practice ; and it is confirmed by the death and resurrection of the faithful and true Witness. The gospel bears every mark of a divine revelation : consequently, as proceeding from a being who cannot

cannot deceive, the system itself may be represented under the general idea of truth. Thus our Saviour himself speaks of it in his last prayer for his apostles : “ Sanctify them through thy truth : thy word is truth.” But the reason of this particular mode of expression is so obvious, that it were loss of time to insist more largely upon the subject.

I proceed, then, *Secondly*, to inquire what we are to understand by “ *walking in the truth.*” And I apprehend, the meaning of the apostle to be this,—That the children of the elect lady, like their venerable parent, were firmly persuaded of the truth of christianity ; and that they lived conformably to their faith.—

First, they assented to the truths contained in the gospel revelation. They believed its discoveries relative to God, his moral government, the state of mankind, the necessity of a Saviour, the appointment of Jesus Christ to this important office, his miracles, death, and resurrection, a future existence beyond the grave, and the happiness or misery consequent upon a present course of behaviour. All these are unquestionable doctrines of the gospel ; and they, *who walk in the truth*, believe them with their whole hearts.

hearts. Some, indeed, have been inclined to think that it was of no consequence what a man believed, provided his life was good : but this is an idea taken up without due examination. Without faith in christianity, there cannot be a good life in the sense of the gospel. Faith in the religion of Jesus is the foundation of evangelical obedience. That we believe, is one of its express commands. To pretend, therefore, to the life of a christian without his faith, is the greatest absurdity imaginable.

But you will say, what is a man to believe ? christians are very much divided in sentiment. What one embraces as a gospel verity, another rejects ; and even the most discerning minds cannot perfectly accord in the interpretation of scripture. The fact is true, but still the conclusion, usually drawn from it, will not follow. Diversity of sentiment there always has been in the christian church. But upon what points have men differed ? Not in regard to the essentials of religion, but things, for the most part, of the least imaginable importance. The facts related by the evangelists, particularly the miracles, death, and resurrection of their Master, the rules of conduct which he enjoined,

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ed, and the life and immortality, which he brought to light, have seldom been a subject of dispute : yet these are the essentials of his religion ; and they who assent to these articles, may be said to believe on the Son of God.

But the assent of the understanding is not all that is intended by *walking in the truth* ; there must be the temper of the gospel, and a life conformable to its laws. An orthodox faith will not be sufficient to denominate a man a christian, unless it work by love, and purify the heart. To superficial observers it may be a sufficient recommendation ; and many persons rank high with them, whose life and conversation are very exceptionable. The sentiments they entertain, are esteemed more than a compensation for their immoralities ; but if we may believe our Saviour, the most perfect adherence to the doctrines of his religion will be of no avail, unless it be accompanied with a corresponding course of behaviour ; and it is reasonable, that the temper and life of a christian should be made the test of his religion ; for of what consequence can it be to believe, unless we practise ? Can it be imagined, that our assent to the being and perfections of a God will be of any
H 2 avail,

avail, if we live without God in the world? that our faith in his Son will qualify us for heaven, if we pay no regard either to his precepts or example? We may believe in a judgment to come; and a future state; yet if we be no way concerned to prepare for the one, and to become interested in the other, our assent to these doctrines will only aggravate our condemnation. In the early christians, faith wrought by works, and by works was made perfect; and such was its operation in the persons so highly commended by the apostle; otherwise, he would not have bestowed such an encomium upon them, or have congratulated their parent on their account.

That walking in the truth is not incompetent to the age and moral ability of young persons, is the *Third* thing I proposed to consider. It is true, their tender years do not qualify them to judge of every doctrine of revelation; many things contained in the gospel exceed their comprehension: but, in very early life, they may understand so much of the christian system, as to know in general what is morally good, and what their Maker has required of them. A child may comprehend these truths,—that there is a God, a
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most powerful, wise, and benevolent Being ;—that he is the Parent, Benefactor, and will be the final Judge of mankind ;—that he so loved the world as to send a most glorious personage, styled his Son, to bless them by turning them from their iniquities ;—that in prosecuting this benevolent work he lost his innocent life, but that it was restored to him on the third day ; that he now lives in heaven, where he is highly rewarded for his obedience unto death ; and that all, who, like him, fear God, and keep his commandments, will hereafter share his glory and happiness. These plain truths a child may so far comprehend, as to yield a rational assent to them.

And as he may be instructed in these first principles of religion, so it is very possible, that they should produce their moral effect upon his heart and life. Mankind are made for religion. And no reason can be assigned, why a child should not be trained up to know and love God, to honour and obey Jesus Christ, to submit to the authority of a parent ; to speak the truth always ; and to be just and kind to all persons. In very early life, some idea of a future state may be communicated. And the motive drawn
thence

thence in favour of a good life may be urged upon a very young mind. The plain truth is, whatever is essential in religion is suited to every age and capacity. Neither the christian faith, nor the christian life, are so mysterious as many would make them. A child may, by good instruction, and a good example, be so improved in knowledge and goodness, as to be said to "*walk in the truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father.*"

But—*Fourthly*—there are instances of early piety, which incontestibly prove the capacity of young persons for a life of religion. The children of the elect lady were found *walking in the truth*. This is asserted by the apostle ; and we have no reason to suppose that he spake the language of flattery. *Samuel* was likewise early distinguished for his piety ; and of *Timothy* it is said, that " from a child he had known the holy scriptures, which were able to make him wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus." And there are other examples, which concur with those already mentioned, to prove that we are early susceptible of religious impressions, and that, at no period of life, virtuous habits may be
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more easily formed. I have no doubt, but, within the circle of our acquaintance, we can all recollect instances which abundantly justify this remark. Have we not each, among the number of our young friends, those who appear to have minds unpolluted by sinful lusts, and hearts formed for religion? are there none, who, in a judgment of charity, remember their Creator in the days of their youth, and discover a proper concern to be better acquainted with his character, and more conformed to his will? are there none among the rising generation who evidently *walk in the truth*? Though childhood and youth are vanity, yet some seeds of virtue have not been ineffectually sown in the young heart. Some youth there are, whose serious turn is a happy indication of their inward sense of religion; and leads us to anticipate, with unspeakable pleasure, their future progress in piety.

But—*Fifthly*—it may be proper to inquire by what probable means they have been so early formed to the temper and life of a christian. And with respect to those who are commended in the text, no doubt the pious instruction and example of their parent were the means, under

under God, of their receiving the truth, and walking in it. We may easily conceive, that upon her own conversion, she became very solicitous for that of her charge. With every good parent, this will be a most important concern. The elect lady, we may therefore suppose, was particularly attentive to their religious education ; and whilst she instructed them in the principles of the gospel, that she was herself a bright example of all its virtues.

And it is in this way “ every child must be trained up in the way he should go.” Their parents, their guardians, or whoever is intrusted with the education of young persons, must early attend to the culture of their hearts. They must inform them of the existence, and moral character of God ; they must instil into their tender minds the love and reverence which are due to him ; they must acquaint them with his benevolent designs respecting the human race ; and the measures, which he has taken for their recovery, and which are now in operation : they must early put into their hands the holy scriptures, particularly the writings of the evangelists and apostles ; and from that inestimable treasure of wisdom, they must

must learn their duty to God, to Jesus Christ, and to their fellow-creatures. Whilst the best instruction is conveyed to their minds, a good example must illustrate and enforce every moral lesson. In vain does a parent recommend religion to his child, unless he goes before him in the path of duty. The influence of a bad example will be more injurious than can easily be imagined ; it will make a far deeper impression than the best moral precepts : consequently, whilst the preaching and the practice are so very different, the season for early improvement will be irrecoverably lost.

Nor is this all ; the manner of instructing deserves attention. Many parents, who have the most tender concern for the future well-being of their children, who are anxious to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and who are examples of the duties which they recommend,—many such parents labour in vain, because they go injudiciously to work. They crowd and oppress the young mind with instruction ; or they begin with the less obvious parts of religion ; or they burden the memory with words, supposing that ideas will hereafter follow of course. By this inju-
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ditions method of instructing, an early disgust is excited in the mind ; and that becomes an intolerable burden, which ought to be its great delight.

To labour with the prospect of success, a very different method should be pursued. The most obvious principles of religion should be first proposed ; and they should be urged when the mind seemed best prepared to receive them. The lessons of instruction should be very short, and they should be frequently repeated. Not only on the Lord's-day, but at all other times, the parent should take occasion to inculcate some religious truth, or make some useful remark to his young charge. In this way, a foundation might be laid for eminent attainments in after life ; and we have reason to think, that, in this way, the most exemplary christians have been formed to the knowledge and practice of virtue. Certain it is, that much of the wickedness, which prevails in the world, may be traced up to the want of a good education in early life. The mind is suffered to contract bad habits, which a more advanced stage of reason cannot correct.

I now proceed to observe, in the *Last* place, the exquisite pleasure it must afford their

their parents, connexions, and friends, and indeed, all who have the interests of religion at heart, to see young persons such an exception to the follies and vanities of the age. The apostle says, that he rejoiced greatly that the children of his venerable friend were found walking in the truth ; and he would not have been a christian if their early virtue had not been to him a source of joy. What can be more pleasing than the exemplary behaviour of youth ? as they advance in years, to see them advance in wisdom, can any sight be more alluring ? must it not endear them to the worst persons ? and to men of any religion, must it not afford the happiest prospect ? how must it rejoice the faithful minister to see the children of his flock walking in the fear of the Lord ? He is appointed to explain and enforce the duties of religion : to behold such fruits of his labours must, therefore, give him unspeakable pleasure.

Society likewise must derive great satisfaction, when its young members appear to be promising characters. But most of all will the parent exult, when those, who are dearest to him, have made that happy choice, which will greatly endear them both to God and man : he has not the

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feelings of a father, who could be capable of a higher gratification : a wise son must make a glad parent ; and of all subjects, it must be the most proper for congratulation, when the children of our friends appear to be the children of God. Happy, happy parents, when you can look round on such an amiable charge ! We congratulate you on your prospects ; we congratulate you, not because your child has merely entered life, but because he has entered it with honour : not because he has a good understanding, but a good heart : not because he is possessed of what is fashionably styled the *graces*, but because the grace of God, which bringeth salvation, hath not been bestowed in vain : not because he merely attends to business, but because he attends to that good part, which cannot be taken from him : not, in one word, because he bids fair to be a man of learning, fame, power, or popularity, but because he exhibits the fair beginnings of an exemplary christian. On these accounts we congratulate the parent ; and to a religious parent there cannot be a more proper subject for congratulation.

That you may experience this joy, let me recommend the earliest attention to your offspring. Soon as their young minds
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are capable of reflection, begin with the easiest principles ; advance to other points as they advance in strength ; reprove, rebuke, and instruct in all righteousness ; to precept add the force of your own example ; exhort them to be followers of you ; and do you be followers of the Lord Jesus. Thus attentive and persevering, you have a prospect of doing the most essential service. No pains, however, can ensure success. Notwithstanding all your labours, you may behold in your successors, sinful youths, and children void of understanding. Should this be the case, you will have the conscious satisfaction that you have not neglected your duty, nor contributed to the misery and ruin of those you love. The event you must leave to providence, but with all diligence you must use those means, which God, in his wisdom, has appointed for the formation of virtuous habits. To this you are bound by the most solemn engagements : upon the dedication of your offspring to the Most High, you promised to “ bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord ;” let not a violation of this promise hereafter rise up in judgment against you.

And the young let me exhort, on their
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part, to receive with meekness those instructions, which are intended for their spiritual good. Endeavour that your hearts be established in the truth ; consult the gospel, if you would know what you are to believe and practise. If you would discover the truth as it is in Jesus, it must be by the commandment which we have received from the Father. The writings of the evangelists and apostles contain our religion ; to us christians they are the ground and pillar of truth. Wherefore, study them with a serious and humble mind, and your understanding will assuredly be enlightened in all things requisite to your salvation.

But having discovered the truth, be careful to walk therein ; let your religious knowledge have an unfailing influence over your life ; be christians, as in speculation, so in practice ; add to your faith virtue and all the christian graces ; let these be in you and abound ; then will you be an ornament to society, and to your parents an unspeakable comfort. They will bless God for the grace bestowed on you ; and will take a generous pride in your improvements. Upon the stage of life you will appear with distinguished reputation ; and hereafter you will shine with superiour lustre. *Amen.*

Sermon VI.

IMPORTANCE OF AN EARLY KNOWLEDGE OF THE SCRIPTURES.

2 TIMOTHY, III. 15.

AND THAT, FROM A CHILD, THOU HAST KNOWN THE HOLY SCRIPTURES, WHICH ARE ABLE TO MAKE THEE WISE UNTO SALVATION, THROUGH FAITH, WHICH IS IN CHRIST JESUS.

IT is the misfortune of some to have descended from parents, from whom they received no good instruction in their tender years ; and from whose example they could learn neither wisdom nor virtue. It is the happiness of others, to have derived their descent from persons of a very opposite character ; through the good providence of God, they were born of parents, who were well acquainted with the nature of religion, who felt its divine power on their hearts, and displayed its excellency in their lives. Hence

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advancing in life, they have advanced in wisdom ; and growing in years, they have “ grown in favour both with God and man.”

Thus happy in his early connexions was Timothy, the friend and fellow-labourer of St. Paul. This amiable youth was born at Lystra. His father was a devout Gentile ; his mother a devout Jewess. According to an ancient reading, the latter was a widow, at the time her son-embraced christianity. His early education had been superintended by two persons of eminent piety, namely, his mother, and her parent, of whom very honourable mention is made by the apostle. Intrusted with the care of Timothy, these excellent females did not neglect their charge ; but they gave all diligence to inspire him with sentiments of early piety ; and to dispose him to live conformably to the religion of Moses. Their labour was not lost : both his head and his heart were capable of cultivation. The latter appears from the manly and religious virtues, which adorned his character ; and, in proof of the former, we have the apostolic commendation in the text ; *“ From a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise*

wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus."

In discoursing on these words, I shall not confine myself to the Jewish scriptures ; nor shall I take a further notice of the moral character, or early improvements of Timothy. My intention, in the choice of this subject, is to point out the benefit, which we may derive from the sacred volume, and to show the necessity of an early application to it.

The great end of a revelation from God is to *make men wise to salvation* ; and to this, the holy scriptures are abundantly competent. They contain all the information, which is necessary to that purpose ; they prescribe such rules of conduct, as are suited to the capacity and circumstances of mankind ; they enforce obedience by motives wisely adapted to the nature of a moral agent ; and they recommend examples which we may safely follow : hence, they are said to be " profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness."

The benefit to be derived from scripture is altogether of a moral nature. The philosopher is not to consult the sacred pages, in expectation of finding the principles

principles of his science. The legislator is not to search them for a system of government ; the statesman is not to repair to them for political information ; the metaphysician is not to study the sacred oracles with a view of finding a solution of his difficulties, or furnishing himself with the materials for abstruse reasoning ; a special revelation was never made for these purposes : compared with the knowledge of our eternal salvation, these speculations are of the smallest moment.

I should not have detained you with these remarks, had not some, in their honest zeal for the credit of revelation, insisted on its competency to every species of information. From the Mosaic account of the creation, some have pretended to deduce the leading principles of the Newtonian philosophy : from the government exercised over the Jews, others have collected a political system ; and there have been persons of so lively an imagination, as to persuade themselves, that the elements of almost every art, science, and improvement might be extracted from certain detached passages of scripture.

A sober examination of the sacred oracles will readily detect these mistakes.

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A man who reads with attention, will find, that the holy scriptures are a fountain of religious information ; he will find in them every thing necessary to make him spiritually wise, and morally good : but if he has political scruples to be satisfied, metaphysical doubts to be solved, or philosophical difficulties to be cleared up, he must repair to some other instructors than Moses, and the prophets, our Saviour, and the apostles.

Nor is it any reflection on the sacred volume, to deny it every other end, than that of making us wise to salvation. On what head can we so much wish for information, as in regard to our duty here, and our condition hereafter ? If we can learn who made us, and for what end we were made ; if we can obtain a clear and satisfactory view of our moral state ; if we can discover what we are to do to be saved ; if we can attain to the certainty of another life, and the conditions upon which that life may be enjoyed ; if we can make these acquisitions, are we not sufficiently enlightened for the end of our creation ? and if the word of God contains this information, is it any disparagement, that it does not clear up all mysteries, and let us into all knowledge ?

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For wise purposes, the author of our being has implanted in man an insatiable curiosity ; but no further than his duty and destination are concerned, is he to expect that this curiosity will be gratified by a supernatural revelation. In all other speculations he must make the best use of his unassisted mental powers ; he must be content to search after truth with great diligence ; and should he sometimes labour in vain, he must not be impatient. Whatever darkness may overspread his mind, whatever difficulties he may meet with in his literary pursuits, he must silence every murmur with the thought, that he is furnished with the means of becoming wise to salvation.

And that every christian is so graciously distinguished, will fully appear, if we examine the holy scriptures. That volume, which we receive and reverence as the word of God, is made up of various compositions : some parts are purely historical, others devotional and practical. In some places we are entertained with the predictions of holy men, who spake as they were moved by the holy spirit ; in other places we have an historical account of their accomplishment. Now the mercies, and now the judgments
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of God are set before us as motives to obedience. The Jewish scriptures begin with the creation, and end at a very interesting period in the history of that people. The christian scriptures contain the public life and instructions of Jesus, his miraculous works, his unmerited sufferings, his ignominious death, his resurrection from the grave, and his ascension to heaven. These great facts are related by four historians, who were divinely qualified for the undertaking : and, by their labours, the religion of Jesus has been preserved to this day. To these memoirs of the Son of God is added a short narrative of the travels, preaching, and public acts of some of the chief apostles, after the ascension of Christ. Their pastoral letters, either to private persons, or particular churches, follow next in order ; and the volume closes with the prophecies of the apostle John, relating to the future state of religion among mankind till the final consummation. These writings form the christian scriptures ; and from the whole collection all necessary information may be obtained. The man of God is thoroughly furnished unto every good work by means of those sacred records,

records, with which the good providence of God has seen fit to indulge us.

To be wise, in the religious sense of the word, is it necessary to have some acquaintance with the character of God? That acquaintance may be obtained, with great facility, from the volume of inspiration. In the sacred scriptures the character of our Maker is faithfully drawn. Whilst the things, which are made, proclaim his eternal power and Godhead, from the word of God we learn, that he is a being of infinite wisdom, and perfect goodness; that he is long-suffering, and of great mercy; that he delights to forgive, but relucts to punish. In the most amiable light, he is exhibited in the gospel; and such an assemblage of natural and moral perfections is there presented to the eye of a christian, that he cannot but feel his obligation to love and reverence the subject in whom those perfections reside.

Again.—In order to be wise to salvation, is a knowledge of our duty as requisite as the knowledge of a God? In this view likewise, the holy scriptures answer every necessary purpose. I do not mean, that for every particular case, which may happen, a special rule may be found; this would swell the volume to such a magnitude

tude as to render it, in a great measure, useless. Only consider the books, which have been written, in order to solve our doubts, and explain our civil duties ; yet those books do not contain a special rule for one out of ten cases, which ordinarily occur. How absolutely impossible then must it be to prescribe a rule for every article of moral conduct ! The duties of morality or religion are far more numerous than those which are merely of a civil nature ; a christian, therefore, must recur to general principles, whenever he wishes for direction.

The holy scriptures presuppose a sense of right and wrong, an acquaintance with the great rules of natural justice, and some idea of the leading truths of natural religion. Otherwise, a definition of the virtues presented, and the vices condemned by the gospel, would have preceded any law relative to those subjects. Before an interdict was laid on extortion, fraud, falsehood, pride, and the like, men would have had a dissertation on these vices : But as nothing of the kind appears, we must admit, that an acquaintance with the nature of these crimes is presupposed ; and that revelation undertakes, not so much to teach new rules of

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duty, as to enforce obedience by new sanctions, and by a greater certainty.

Accordingly, when we repair to the word of God, we find the great duties of piety, justice, benevolence, humility, the forgiveness of injuries, and the like, prescribed in general terms. To illustrate the subject, examples are introduced. Sometimes these examples are fictitious; at other times, some well known fact is introduced for the purpose of clearing up some important duty. I need not dwell on the mode of instruction pursued in scripture. It is sufficient to observe, that the preceptive part of the sacred writings is divinely calculated to "make us wise to salvation, through faith, which is in Christ Jesus."

Finally.—In the writings of the evangelists and apostles, we have a plain account of the moral state of mankind. We there perceive the necessity of a Saviour, and the provision made for our salvation. From those books we learn the character of Jesus Christ, his humiliation, suffering, and death; his resurrection, ascension, and commission, as judge of the world. We learn also, that because he lives, we shall live also. We learn, that, at his second coming, we shall be raised from

from the dead ; that an account of all the deeds done in the body will be required of us ; and that every man will be rewarded according to his works. In one word, we learn from the christian scriptures, that, if we have made our peace with God, have repented of all our sins, have believed on Jesus Christ, and obeyed the gospel, our future condition will be unspeakably glorious, and eternally happy. And, on the other hand, that it will be as miserable, should we leave the world hardened in sin, and confirmed in unbelief.

Such is the information, which every man may derive from the volume of scripture. He may discover the character of God, and the nature of his obligations to him. He may discover the vices to be avoided, and the virtues to be practised, by a moral, accountable creature. He may learn the temper, which he ought always to manifest towards his fellow-men. He may learn his relation to Jesus Christ, the benefits received from him, his all-sufficiency, as a Saviour, and the nature of that salvation, which he has purchased with his blood. And, to add no more, he may thoroughly acquaint himself with the terms, upon which that salvation is offered

offered to mankind. Such information is the privilege of all who have the holy scriptures in their hands ; they have every advantage for becoming wise and good ; for, upon inspection, it will appear, that the scriptures are able to build us up, and to give us an inheritance among them, who are sanctified.

Having thus considered the excellency of those oracles, with which God, in his wise providence, has seen fit to indulge us, I proceed to point out the advantages of an early application to them. Of Timothy, it is recorded, that from a child he knew the holy scriptures. The pious and watchful guardians of his youth turned his early attention to religious studies. They put the word of God into his hands ; its wonders and its truths caught his attention ; and at a period, when the memory is most retentive, he treasured up a store of religious knowledge, upon which he found it convenient to draw on all future occasions.

And happy would it be, were the same measures now used with the rising generation. Notwithstanding all the objections, which have been made to the practice, I am still convinced, that the sacred scriptures ought to be read in all places
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of public instruction ; and that young children should be introduced to the word of God, as soon as they are capable of understanding its simplest truths. If they do not read their bibles when young, they will never consult them in after life. When sufficiently advanced to enter the circle of pleasure, or to engage in business, they will have little time or relish for serious speculation. A veneration for the scriptures must have grown with their growth, and the habit of perusing them must have been early formed, otherwise the word of God will never make them wise to salvation.

In proof of this, only reflect how many plead their engagements in excuse for neglecting all religious studies. The man of business urges his want of time ; his cares and avocations are so many, that he cannot indulge himself with a portion of scripture. Those, who are raised to public places and employments, make a similar excuse. The labourer pleads that he must support his family ; and domestic concerns are urged by others. Some there are, who, notwithstanding all their cares and interruptions, do command a portion of each day, for the purpose of religious improvement. But it will be acknowl-

edged, that the number of such bears no proportion to the multitude, who live in the habitual neglect of the word and fountain of truth. By those, who are sufficiently matured for business or pleasure, it is notorious, that the scripture is seldom consulted, even as a matter of curiosity, much less for the purpose of religious information.

Is it not, then, reasonable to conclude, that unless the divine oracles are put into our hands in early life, they will make no part of our future studies. Shall we ever read them, unless we do it when young? When we have less curiosity, and less time, is it probable that we shall begin so large a work as to make ourselves masters of the holy scriptures? Whoever will allow himself time to reflect, must be convinced, that if we ever become acquainted with the word of God, the foundation of that acquaintance must be laid very early in life. From the conduct of too many, who profess to believe the inspired writings, we may justly draw this conclusion.

No doubt, many errors have been committed in the mode of communicating divine instruction to the young mind. That a portion of the scripture should ever be imposed by way of punishment
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is an impious absurdity. Nor is it less preposterous, to insist on an equal attention to all parts indiscriminately, without considering what *is*, and what may not be level to a young capacity. It is the duty of parents and instructors to direct their young charge to such portions of the sacred history, to such moral lessons, to such ingenious parables, as they can both comprehend and retain. Many such occur both in the Jewish and christian scriptures. And if these select parts employ their early studies, we may hope that they will improve in knowledge as they advance in years, and eventually become wise to salvation.

How thankful ought we to be, that we have such a guide to virtue and happiness? Compared with that of others, how distinguished is our situation? If to be wise to salvation, ought to be the great concern of our lives, what advantages do we enjoy for the accomplishment of that end? In common with others, we have the light of reason; the volume of nature is open before us, and we have the same opportunity with the rest of mankind for acquainting ourselves with its sacred truths. But in addition to this source of religious instruction, we have
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the gospel. That divine revelation, which God imparted to mankind by Jesus Christ, is committed to us ; and we may make it subservient to our spiritual improvement here, and our immortal felicity hereafter.

Let us then search the scriptures. Let a reasonable portion of our time be set apart for storing the mind with religious knowledge ; and, for divine information, let us betake ourselves to the proper source. The sacred writings contain the religion of protestants ; they want not the decrees of councils, or the decisions of popes. To make out a rational system, they require not the aid of human tradition. The canonical scriptures are, in their view, sufficient for all the purposes of life and godliness.

Wherefore, as protestants, let us read and think for ourselves. In consulting the oracles of God, let us make use of our understanding ; let us read with care, and examine with a serious concern, that our minds may be enlightened, our errors corrected, our prejudices subdued, our hearts changed, our souls enriched with every christian grace, and our lives adorned with every christian virtue. For these religious purposes, let us have recourse to the word of truth. To our studies

studies let us join our prayers. So may we hope that the word will profit us, as it doth the upright : and that our improvements here will prepare us for new acquisitions of divine knowledge in that state of glory and perfection, to which we are hastening.

I cannot dismiss the subject, without again adverting to the example in the text. His early acquaintance with the scriptures, was through life a singular advantage to Timothy. Let all care be taken to improve our young charge by the same means of sacred information. In the morning of life let them be introduced to the plain, practical, and devotional parts of the sacred volume. As the understanding ripens, let its doctrines be proposed ; let its duties be urged as points of the last importance ; and let the study of scripture be encouraged by our own example. So may we hope that the word of God will dwell in them richly : that in life they will do honour to themselves ; and that they will requite their labours, who have superintended their education. For it is well observed by one, who had studied human nature,—“ Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.” *Amen.*

Sermon VII.

REVERENCE OF THE SCRIPTURES A CORRECTIVE OF YOUTHFUL FOLLIES.

PSALM cxix. 9.

WHEREWITHAL SHALL A YOUNG MAN CLEANSE HIS WAY? BY TAKING HEED THERETO ACCORDING TO THY WORD.

THAT youth is a season of danger may be inferred from the many warnings, admonitions, and reproofs, which are addressed to young persons in the sacred writings. The book of Proverbs abounds with the most persuasive recommendations of early virtue. Many other parts of the Jewish scriptures inculcate the same lessons; and, in the christian revelation, the dangers to which young persons are exposed, and the duties incumbent on them, are pointed out with such clearness, that if any do not grow in virtue as they grow

grow in years, they are absolutely without excuse.

To begin well is a point of infinite importance. I know, it is commonly said, that a thoughtless youth will make a discreet man ; but this I take to be one of those positions which have been admitted without sufficient examination ; and which want the solid foundation of uncontrovertible fact. No doubt there are many follies of youth, of which a *man* would be ashamed. In mature life a person would blush to be detected in some particular kinds of mischief which were the delight and dishonour of his younger years ; but notwithstanding this seeming reformation, there is no real moral change. The unprincipled youth is often an unprincipled man ; the young liar becomes an old deceiver ; the young knave an old cheat ; the young sceptic an old infidel ; and the young debauchee a miserable and contemptible old sensualist. I do not pretend that this is invariably the case ; there may be exceptions ; but still it so often happens, that men grow hardened as they grow old, that I again repeat it, *that it is of infinite importance to begin life in a proper manner.*

Deeply impressed with this momentous truth,

truth, I have invited your attention to the words of the text. The psalmist inquires, "*wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?*" he answers,—"*by taking heed thereto according to thy word.*" In this inquiry and reply are suggested many important truths. Some of those truths I shall make the subject of this discourse, presuming they will be unacceptable to none, while they claim the particular attention of my younger hearers.

First.—It is taken for granted, that there are some follies, vanities, improprieties, or positive immoralities to which the season of youth is particularly liable; the inquiry—"*wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way?*"—manifestly implies this; and so far from being the groundless imputation of severe old age, we know, both from experience and observation, that childhood and youth are vanity.

I. In the *First* place, young persons are strongly tempted to make light of serious things; to indulge themselves in a pert and irreverent way of speaking upon the subject of religion; and to undervalue those religious institutions from which both individuals and society have derived unspeakable benefit. This, I am sorry to say

say it, is not the peculiar fault of one of the sexes. Though, in justice to females, it must be acknowledged, that, in general, they have much fairer minds than youths of the other sex, yet, even among them, there may be found that indelicacy and irreverence of behaviour, which are a scandal to any rational being. Whether they have learned to talk profanely from bad books or bad company, it is not material to determine ; but this is certain, whenever a young female professes to have no regard for religion, it may be inferred that she sets no value on her honour ; that her reputation is a burden ; and that she is a forward candidate for the infamy of an habitual prostitution. Vain is it to plead that such an inference would be disavowed. As religion is congenial to the female mind, and the surest safe-guard of female virtue, when one of this sex professes to have no religion, we are authorized to draw the most unfavourable conclusion.

But from an object, in every view so disgusting, it is with pleasure I turn away. Well assured that in those I now behold, I behold no such instance of depravity, I shall confine myself to the levity, and profane irreverence of my own sex. And

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I have observed, that these are faults from which a young man should cleanse himself. Upon entering life, a youth perceives among those, who are called the serious class of people, some who appear unreasonably gloomy and austere ; hence he too hastily infers that religion is an enemy of human happiness. He imagines, that should he become a christian, he must bid adieu to those innocent pleasures for which he feels a strong relish, and which are particularly suited to his period of life. To such a sacrifice he cannot patiently submit ; he therefore grows jealous of religion ; insults it as an enemy ; and reviles it as a disturber of his enjoyments. His prejudices and irreverence are confirmed by the profane ridicule of those, who have become hardened in vice ; and the prospect before him, of many years to come, emboldens him to take those audacious liberties, at which he would otherwise be filled with horror. Thus from a concurrence of circumstances are persons in early life naturally betrayed into a course of behaviour, which, at that time, is their dishonour, and may eventually be their ruin.

2. A *Second* fault, though not peculiar to youth, yet very common among young persons,

persons, is an inconsiderate prodigality in regard to time. Because they have but lately entered upon the stage of life, they seem to think there will be no end to their career. The years past, they wholly overlook, and multiply those which are to come. They persuade themselves, that they have such a stock of time on hand, that parsimony would be a superfluous virtue. There is no call, they practically say, for gathering up every fragment, and suffering no moment to be lost : let those in advanced life be prudent and saving ; their stock is almost exhausted, but we have many years in store ; and for this reason we may claim a greater indulgence.

Arguing in this manner, young persons suffer many days, months, and years, to pass unimproved. Unaware of the value of time, they lose many opportunities of acquiring useful knowledge. At a period, when the curiosity is most awake, and the memory most retentive, a rational gratification is withheld from the former, and the latter remains unfurnished. Hence, it often happens, that a youth finds himself in an awkward situation, when a family, or society, calls for his services. He wakes, as it were, from a dream ; and just discovers his loss, when it is too late to repair it. Nor

Nor do these observations apply to one sex only ; it is a common fault with young persons of every description to waste their time. To sleep, far more hours are devoted than nature requires ; and, on this head, many females in this town have the utmost reason to accuse themselves. How much better would it be to employ the morning of the day, as well as the morning of life, in those studies, reflections, pursuits, and cares, which are suited to their sex ; and which will qualify them for the part they are to act under the governing providence of God !

3. *Thirdly* :—There is a strong tendency in youth to those amusements and sensual gratifications, which, at the same time, undermine the health, consume their substance, and divert their thoughts from their proper business. A portion of their time may very innocently be devoted to such amusements, as are sanctioned by the sober laws of their country ; but it is one thing to relax at proper seasons, and another to live in a round of pleasure. An occasional recourse to innocent diversions is widely different from a life of dissipation. It is the latter only which reason condemns ; and against which religion more solemnly protests.

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Unhappily for the cause of virtue, the sober part of mankind have not distinguished with so much accuracy as the subject required. They have sometimes involved in the same condemnation an occasional retreat from business and a life of indolence. With equal severity they have protested against the gay diversions of a leisure hour, and an habitual course of dissipation. Such indiscriminate censure has produced a very bad effect. It has implanted in the young mind an inveterate prejudice against the persons, the counsels, and example of those, who were actuated by no other principle than a generous concern for the rising generation.

You will, therefore, remember that I am now complaining only of that thoughtless, riotous, expensive, and dissipated mode of living, which unfits men no less for civil society, than for the kingdom of heaven. When a youth is tempted to neglect his business for pleasure ; when midnight revels impair his constitution ; and when he indulges to any species of intemperate excesses, he then falls into the snare, which is laid more immediately for young persons. Satan has gained the

victory which he usually meditates against such objects.

Thus have I pointed out some of the impurities of which *a young man* is exhorted to *cleanse his way*. - He is to correct a light, vain, and foolish way of talking upon subjects of a religious nature. He is to grow more saving of his time ; and to redeem (if possible) the moments he has lost. If hitherto he has wasted his substance in riotous living, or his health in sensual excesses, he is to form new habits, and such as are more becoming the dignity of human nature. In short, he is to cleanse his way of every moral impurity : to get the better of every vicious inclination ; and to subdue every lust which may war against the soul. This is his duty : the question now is, how these ends may be effected ?

And to this we have an answer in the text. A young man, says the psalmist, may cleanse his way *by taking heed thereto according to God's word*. The sacred writings exhort persons of every description to consider the nature and tendency of their conduct. " Thus saith the Lord of hosts, consider your ways,"—is an admonition which occurs in many parts of the scripture ; and *inconsideration* is a charge frequently

frequently brought against habitual transgressors. *My people doth not consider*, is an expression which God himself uses, when characterizing his own nation.

Thus indisposed to serious reflection, mankind are frequently admonished to take heed to their ways ; to compare them with the known rule of duty ; and to trace their consequences both here and hereafter. Among others, young men are exhorted in this strain. In order to correct any thing that may be amiss, they are particularly admonished to take a cool, deliberate, and impartial view of their actions. This, it is supposed, will be divinely efficacious in subduing bad habits, and implanting good ones.

In the *First* place, by taking heed to his ways, a youth will be naturally cured of that impiety and irreverence which take the lead among early vices. He will ask himself, what possible advantage can accrue from making light of religion ? Suppose I insult the opinions, and wound the feelings, of its serious professors, will my pertness raise my character, or promote my interest in the world ? Shall I be esteemed more wise, more learned, or more witty on account of my profaneness ? No : because some of the greatest fools are
among

among the greatest scoffers. Why then should I incur the certain contempt of my betters, give offence to the sober part of mankind, disgrace a parent, and offend the Author of my being, when no possible advantage can be derived from such impious behaviour? Religion may be, it undoubtedly is, a momentous reality. Common prudence, therefore, if I have any, will dispose me to treat religion with respect; for which reason, I mean to enter on a new course of behaviour. Professing to be wise, I will no more act the part of a fool. My tongue in future shall be restrained by the laws of decency and propriety; and by the utmost circumspection for the time to come, I will endeavour to atone for my past misbehaviour. Into this train of reflection would a young man naturally fall, who should take heed to his ways according to God's word.

Secondly.—Let us suppose a youth, unaware of the value of time, had lived hitherto in habits of idleness, the same attention to his manner of living would produce the same effect. Reviewing the many days, months, and years, which had been worse than lost, he would be led to exclaim, to what purpose is all this waste of a short and transitory life? On such

such a treasure as time, why have I set no greater value? I am now entering the world, but what are my qualifications to discharge the various duties of a worthy member of society? Is my mind sufficiently informed? Do I know any thing of mankind? Have I that acquaintance with books, which has become necessary in an enlightened age; and among an inquisitive people? Have I qualified myself for business? To these questions I am furnished with a ready, but most unfavourable answer. I am but too conscious of my deficiency in all those branches, in which a youth of spirit would wish to excel; my error, therefore, must be repaired without delay. In proportion to my past indolence, I must be active in future; and I must instantly prepare for some useful and honourable profession, that my friends may not be ashamed of me, nor society blush at so unworthy a member.

Thirdly.—By taking heed to his way, a young man would be cleansed of a violent passion for sensual and intemperate gratifications; he would be cured of the love of pleasure; and a disposition to waste his substance in riotous living would, by this rational procedure, be absolutely extinguished. He would reflect within himself,

himself, I was not born merely to eat, drink, and enjoy myself. My substance was not given me that I might squander it in amusements. Nor was I originally blest with health, that, by a course of high and irregular living, I might try the vigour of my constitution! What am I to do when my substance is spent, and my constitution exhausted? What course am I to take, when, with an unabated love of pleasure, I have lost all the means of gratification? Shall I fasten myself upon the prudent and industrious, and devour the fruits of their labours? Shall I flatter the vanity of some great man in order to drink of his cup, and feast at his table? Shall I receive protection from society, without rendering any return? No: my spirit is too *great* to lie under the burden of such a debt; I will show myself a reasonable being. The time past has been sacrificed: the time to come shall be improved. To be a good member of society, and a good christian, shall be the only object of my future ambition.

In my mind there is no doubt, that such an attention to his conduct would produce these reflections in the mind of a sensible youth; and that these reflections would be attended with the best effect.

effect. I would, therefore, earnestly recommend my young friends to take heed to their way according to the divine word. Examine those writings, which are said to contain your duty, and to reveal your future destination. Inquire what the Father, and the Saviour of mankind expect from persons of your standing. Having discovered your duty, try your behaviour by its unerring rules. In the gospel do you find any thing that will countenance the liberty which some profanely take with sacred things? Is any countenance given to idleness and dissipation? Does the religion of Jesus furnish any apology for rioting and drunkenness, chambering and wantonness? Does it hold out any desirable prospect to those who are guilty of these things? by no means: its invariable language is, that such as offend in this manner shall not inherit the kingdom of God. Whether they be young or old, they are declared unfit, as well as unworthy of the heavenly blessedness.

You will, therefore, pay an immediate attention to your way, and use every appointed mean to cleanse it of all impurity. Consider how you are now employing the time and talents which God
hath

hath bestowed upon you. Are you laying a foundation for a life of honour and usefulness in the world, or a foundation for future shame and disgrace? If you are doing well, go on; we wish you God speed. May your early virtue receive every encouragement. Under its influence, you will have that peace, which passeth all understanding, which may God grant through Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

Sermon VIII.

OUR CREATOR TO BE REMEMBERED
IN YOUTH.

ECCLESIASTES, XII. I.

REMEMBER NOW THY CREATOR IN THE DAYS OF
THY YOUTH, WHILE THE EVIL DAYS COME
NOT, NOR THE YEARS DRAW NIGH, WHEN
THOU SHALT SAY, I HAVE NO PLEASURE IN
THEM.

THE season of youth is of all others
most exposed to the snares and tempta-
tions of a deceitful world ; to the domin-
ion of the lusts, appetites, and passions ;
and to the crafty wiles of “ that roaring
lion who is seeking whom he may de-
vour.” Unpractised in the arts of that
grand foe, heedless of the present effects,
and regardless of the future consequences
of their folly, they pass on, “ as the ox to
the slaughter ; and as the bird hasteth to
the toil, not knowing that it is for life.”

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It is a melancholy truth, that in the *spring of life*, few are disposed to concern themselves with the affairs of religion or another world. Notwithstanding the repeated admonitions, rebukes, and warnings from God, his word, and providence, they wantonly defer the *one thing needful* to a future day, when *they can take pleasure in it*. They imagine, they have just entered upon the stage of pleasure ; upon a round of uninterrupted delights ; that religion is of a moping, melancholy, unsocial nature ; a fit companion only to decrepid old age, and an inveterate enemy to all present enjoyment : that to court an acquaintance with it, ere the evil days came on, were at once shaking hands with solitary gloom, silence, and despair !

But however regardless of their Creator many may be, in the days of their youth, they still resolve to “ consider of their ways, to die the death of the righteous, and to have their latter end like his.” Few have ever so hardened their hearts, blinded their eyes, or stupified their consciences, as not to form such resolutions in their cooler moments. “ To break off their sins by righteousness, and their iniquities by turning to God ;” to repent and reform in some future period, is the fixed determination

determination even of the most thoughtless, idle and profane. But the misfortune is, they are for procrastinating this important work, not to set about it while it is called to-day ; by means of which, many are “ hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” By habitually indulging the desires of the flesh and the mind, and gratifying those lusts which war against the soul, the conscience becomes seared as with a hot iron, the moral sense awfully impaired, and the whole man given up to “ work uncleanness with all possible greediness.” Such is the nature of criminal indulgences, when once the law in our members has acquired a habit of triumphing over the law of the mind, “ though we would do good, evil will be present with us.”

You cannot then but perceive the great importance of the caution in the text, *Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth.* And you, my young friends, must feel *yourselves* peculiarly interested in it. Never was there greater need of such a caution than at this present day. Never did vice of every species make larger strides towards universal dominion ; never had immorality of every kind greater power to run and be glorified !

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You will, therefore, permit me to address myself to *you* in the following discourse ; and you will favour me with that attention which such a subject confessedly deserves. Perhaps you may think that advice of this nature would proceed with a better grace, with greater force and energy, from more aged lips. I will not pretend to deny it ; but sure I am, it could not proceed from a heart more sincerely interested in your welfare ; from a soul more intirely devoted to your service. My conscience bears me witness, that my prayer to God for you is,—“ That you may remember him, your Creator, in the days of your youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when ye shall say, we have no pleasure in them,”—that you may flee sinful lusts,—be sober minded, chaste and temperate,—that you may pass through life with reputation, and dignity,—finish your course with joy,—and at length receive that crown, which God the righteous Judge hath promised to bestow.

There can be no difficulty in determining to whom this address in the text is directed. We all know what is meant by the season of youth. I need not, therefore, inquire at what precise age it begins, and

and where it as precisely terminates. Suffice it to say, that this discourse is principally calculated for those who are just entering or entered on life; who expect to see many good days; and look forward with the most delightful expectations towards years to come: for such it is, who are most exposed to be led astray, captivated by Satan, the prince of darkness, at his will.

In further discoursing upon this subject, we shall then, in the *first* place, inquire into the particular duties involved in the general caution, "*to remember our Creator in the days of our youth.*"

And, *Secondly*, the motives, reasons, and arguments which enforce this upon us in the *spring of life*, ere the *evil days come*, in which we can take no pleasure.

First.—We are to remember our Creator in the days of our youth. That is, in other words, we are to devote ourselves, our time, our talents, our powers, faculties, and all we have, to God and his service. We are to make his glory the great object of all our pursuits;—and whatever we do, whether we eat or drink, we are to do all to the honour of his name. Agreeably to the advice of David, "we are to know the God of our fathers, and to serve him

him with a perfect heart and a willing mind." "For the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts ; if we seek him, he will be found of us ; if we forsake him, he will cast us off forever." Similar to which also is the language of the preacher,—“ Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth ; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the light of thine eyes ; but know thou, that for all these things, God will bring thee into judgment.” And in like manner the apostle “ exhorts us to be sober minded, to flee youthful lusts,” &c. Why are *young people* thus particularly singled out were it not that *they* are *eminently* exposed to forget their Creator, to indulge to sensual gratifications, and to be “ lovers of pleasure, more than lovers of God” ? But as this is an injunction of great and solemn importance, we shall, agreeably to the plan proposed, consider it more distinctly.

“ *Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth.*” The first and most obvious sense of these words is, that we are not to forget there is such a being as God, who spake us and all things into existence ;
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who breathed into our nostrils the breath of life ; who furnished us with intelligence and every faculty suited to our nature ; who is our parent, guardian, and benefactor ; who is the author of “ every good and perfect gift.” Neither is this exhortation chargeable with impertinence. How often do we, in our youthful days, *live, as it were, without God in the world ?* We scarcely seem to recollect that there is any thing, throughout the whole circuit of existence, worthy our attention, excepting ourselves ; that there is a God that *we should serve him ; and much less, any profit, should we pray unto him !*

In the text, then, we are first reminded, that we have a Creator every way worthy our special notice. That this is a truth capable of demonstration, you will not pretend to dispute. You need not ask, “ who will go up to heaven to bring him down from thence ; nor descend into the deep to bring him up from thence ; he is not far from each of you ; for in him you live, move, and have your being.”

However, it is not sufficient to know the God of our fathers merely in this view ; but we are to remember him with love, sincerity, and gratitude. We are to recollect the innumerable obligations
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we are under to him for life, breath, and all things. We must consider him as the author of every comfort ; undeservedly good to all ; and bestowing his mercies indiscriminately upon all his works. And from such a sense and view of his perfections, we must feel ourselves disposed to love him with our whole heart, strength, and mind.

But we are not to stop here. If we would *remember our Creator*, according to the spirit of the text, it must be intirely in the way of unreserved obedience. What avails it to profess to know God, unless we worship and serve him as God ; pay him that unfeigned respect which is due to his character ; that homage to which he has an unalienable right ? It is with these services he is well pleased. It is not sufficient that we acknowledge his existence ; for the devils themselves do as much, and tremble. It is not enough at times to indulge a grateful resentment ; but the tide of gratitude must be continually rising within us. It will not suffice that we just not forget him ; but we must regard him as the only object of our supreme love, reverence and obedience.—There must be nothing to us in heaven like *him*, nor on earth to be desired in preference.

preference to him. In short, if we *would remember our Creator* agreeably to the full extent of the precept, we must come up as near as possible to the standard of the christian character. That system of doctrines and precepts, which constitutes the gospel, must be our great directory, the invariable rule of all our lives, and our meditation day and night. In imitation of its Author, we must be “holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners.” Like *him*, we must aim, as we grow in stature, to grow also in favour with God and man. To discharge all our respective duties with fidelity, and as far as possible “walk in all the commandments and ordinances blameless.” Every injunction, whether respecting God, our neighbour, or ourselves, is summarily comprehended in that of *remembering our Creator*; and we must keep the whole law, without wilfully transgressing one point, if we would testify that regard for him which his perfections, and our obligations, concur to demand.

But how sinfully deficient are all ages and characters, but more especially those of youth, in the duties above mentioned! Is it not eminently the language of their hearts;—“What is the Almighty, that we

we should serve him, and what profit should we have, if we should pray unto him? Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." How rarely do *they* suffer a serious thought to enter their minds? And when reflections of such a nature force themselves upon their notice, do they not dismiss them to a more convenient opportunity? How are they disposed to postpone the business of religion, and make void its demands by the most trifling excuses? To cast contempt upon their father, protector, and friend, and, basely disingenuous, to "forfake the fountain of living waters, and lightly esteem the rock of their salvation." Thus, amid the variety of pursuits which incessantly employ their time and attention, how small a portion of either are devoted to the honour and happiness of their immortal souls? Such a mode of conduct is not more *disingenuous* than it is *dangerous*. For they who refuse to offer to God their *first fruits*, run the most *dreadful hazard*; they are hourly exposed to the arrest of death, and to be hurried away to their long home, with all their "imperfections on their heads."

But this leads to the *Second* consideration, which was, the motives, reasons, and

and arguments, which inforce the duty in the text, before “those evil days come, in which we shall say, we take no pleasure in them.”

And a very important argument in favour of an early dedication to God, is *the singular beauty, and amiable excellence of religion in a youthful character*. Religion, it is true, shines with unparalleled lustre wherever it be found ; but *early piety* is peculiarly pleasing, both in the sight of God and man. There is something inexpressibly striking in it ; at the very time it rejoices the thoughtful, it does not fail to move the most thoughtless and profane. While these last may affect to deride it, they but too plainly discover a conscious inferiority whenever they are in its presence. But God also has been pleased to encourage *young converts* with the promise of his distinguished regards. He will never “forget the kindness of their youth” ; he will “love them that love him, and such as seek him early shall find him.” The *youngest* of our Lord’s apostles was his favourite ; and the blessed Jesus testified an *uncommon regard* for the *young* man who inquired of him “what he should do to be saved ?” We can, therefore, entertain no kind of doubt, but the dedication of
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our *youthful capacities* to the service of God and religion, is a sacrifice, with which he will be well pleased.

But, *secondly*, it is of infinite advantage to remember our Creator in the days of our youth. It certainly guards us against many inconveniences, by creating us friends out of the mammon of unrighteousness. Bad as the world is, the most vicious are generally disposed to favour and protect a virtuous character. "For who is he that will harm such as are followers of that which is good." To consecrate the *bloom of our youth* to the practice of those things which are just, true, and pure, will therefore advantage us in many *outward* respects. And hence the observation of the wise man : "Happy is he that findeth wisdom, and he that getteth understanding ; length of days is in her right hand, and in her left, riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." None have a fairer prospect of passing through life with dignity, honour and reputation, than such as "remember their Creator in the days of their youth." Besides, such have the strongest reason to conclude, that God will take them under his peculiar care, provide for all their wants, support
them

them under every difficulty, guard them from every danger, guide them by his counsel, and continually cheer them with the smiles of his providence ; not to mention the natural tendency of an early course of religious obedience,—to lengthen our days, and render them easy, comfortable, and happy. Whosoever then would love life, and see many good days, let him keep himself from evil, and restrain his feet from every false way. Let him serve the Lord with a perfect heart, and submit to his commands with a willing mind : so shall he find a refuge in every trouble, and a present help in every time of need.

But this early consecration to God, and his service, will also redound infinitely to our advantage, considered in a *moral* and *spiritual* view. It will secure to us our own self-enjoyment, by preserving us from those stings of conscience, and that wounded spirit which none can bear. We shall enjoy an inward ease, and heart-felt satisfaction ; a happiness which could be exceeded only by the joys of heaven. Amid the various troubles and trials of life, we shall possess ourselves without distraction, knowing we have every thing to hope from Him who is our friend and

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everlasting

everlasting portion. And further, we shall, by so *seasonable* an attention to the business of religion, make the greatest progress in virtue and holiness, till we at length arrive at the stature of perfect men in Christ. We shall early attain the pardon of our sins, the favour and friendship of our Maker, an adoption into his family, and a title to all the privileges of the sons of God. And are these blessings few, light, or small? Is there any thing on earth worthy to be compared to them? To have our iniquities forgiven and our sins covered;—to be of that number to whom it shall be the Father's good pleasure to give the kingdom, must surely be a source of happiness, far transcending all the joys of sense.

But, *thirdly*; a still greater advantage, resulting from a conformity to the admonition in the text, is the more abundant entrance which it will administer to us into the kingdom of the Redeemer. If revelation is to be regarded, we may depend upon it as a truth, that there are different degrees of glory in that holy and blessed place. And it is certain, that such as have made it the concern of their whole lives to keep the divine commandments, will have a right to richest fruit
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on the tree of life ; to the most exalted station in the paradise on high.

Of those many mansions in our Father's house, *they* will have a first choice ; *they* will shine as the sun in the firmament, while others resemble the stars only in those regions of glory : for *early* converts, we may well suppose, best fitted for such superiour enjoyments. They who have made the greatest advances in grace and holiness, who have brought forth most fruit unto God, will enter upon the joys of heaven with a relish every way suited to that perfect state. Having been faithful in a few things, they will then be invested with the rule over many things ; having gained ten talents, they will share a proportionable reward ; in as much as they have been more stedfast, immoveable, and industrious than others, so shall they be honoured with a “ far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”

Thus I have attempted to give you a brief description of the advantages of *early* piety ; of *remembering the Creator in the days of our youth*. You must perceive that religion shines with distinguished lustre in that season of life. *A young christian*,—how excellent, how amiable a character ! you cannot be ignorant also that it will greatly

greatly advance your temporal interest ; that it has the “ promise of the life which now is, as well as that which is to come :” neither can you be insensible of that exceeding great reward which is reserved for such, in the heavenly world. Can you then desire any greater inducements to engage you to dedicate yourselves, your souls, and all within you, to God and religion ? Are not length of days, riches and honour, and immortal felicity in the divine presence, worthy your pursuit ? Are any of the pleasures of sense to be compared with that glory which shall be revealed ?

Resolve then, I intreat you, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, to give them up as willing instruments to promote the declarative glory of God ; and make haste, delay not to put your resolution into practice.

But if, notwithstanding the exhortations, warnings, and encouragements of God, you still continue to despise his law, profane his name, and turn his grace into wantonness, your behaviour will at least be chargeable with dissingenuity and rashness ; for what could be more ingrateful, what could argue a viler disposition, than to forsake *him* to whom you are under
such

such obligations ? Is not the Former of your bodies, the Father of your spirits, and the Redeemer of your souls, is not he worthy some kind of notice and regard ? Can you have the confidence to expect his care and protection when your whole lives are virtually a denial of his very existence ? Even the brute creation are a reflection upon your ingenuofness, for the ox knoweth his owner, and the despicable ass his master's crib ; the very lowest order of animals seems to have some kind partiality for the hand that feeds them ; it is “ *you* only that know not, *you* that do not consider.” Upon what principles can you justify such behaviour to your reason and conscience ? Where is your gratitude ? where is your sensibility ? where is honour ; the three fashionable virtues of the present day ? “ O lost to virtue, lost to manly thought,” lost to every thing noble, generous and good, to forsake your Patron and your Friend ; to regard your everlasting portion with a cold indifference, or a stupid insensibility !

But such actions are not only vile, and disingenuous, but *rash*, and *dangerous* to the last degree. How soon may the night of death surprise you ? How soon may you be hurried to that world, where

tears will not avail, all groans will be rejected, and where repentance will be without success? You cannot assure yourselves, that even this night your souls shall not be required of you. The king of terrors extends his wide dominion over all mankind. The young and old equally bow to his sceptre. Neither the smiles of youth, nor charms of beauty, are a defence against his attacks. Take a circle among the tombs, and only consult the monuments of the dead, and you will see, as Job says, that “*many die in their full strength, being wholly at ease and quiet, their breasts full of milk, and their bones moistened with marrow.*” To many such of youthful acquaintance, *you* may have paid the last tribute; and many others, in the *prime and flower of their days*, are continually passing off the stage; and shall not such instances of mortality alarm your fears, and dispose you to consideration? What assurance have you that the same fate will not be your own?

If these things then are even so, what manner of persons ought you to be? Is it not stupidity, is it not folly and madness, to leave the vast concerns of eternity to the mercy, perhaps, of one moment? This “procrastination is the thief of time;”

time ;" it will imperceptibly steal upon year after year, and for the same reason you neglected the care of your souls *yesterday*, you may *to-day* and *forever*. The wise man observes, there is a season for all things ; to weep and to rejoice, to labour and to relax ; but when is there a more convenient season for the business of religion, than when the powers of both body and mind are lively, vigorous and active ? " This is the accepted time, this the day of salvation." What distraction then to defer it, till the memory becomes weak, the resolution feeble, and the executive powers unfit for action.

But further ;—Unless we consider of our ways in the early part of life, it is more than probable we shall go off the stage utterly unacquainted with the " things which belong to our peace." In our tender years, the mind is easily impressed, the conscience roused, and the will and affections moved and directed ; but this is not the case as we advance toward maturity. Vicious habits harden the heart, blind the eyes, and stupify the conscience ; hence it is, that such, as have long persevered in a course of sin, are seldom disposed to consecrate themselves to God, even when those evil days come,

in which they can take no pleasure. It is the nature of sin, to blunt the moral sense, and overturn the influence and authority of conscience ; “ to speak peace to the mind, which ought to know no peace ; ” and to render it proof against all the invitations of virtue and religion. Agreeably to this, is the admonition of the apostle : “ Exhort one another daily while it is called to-day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” If it is *possible*, it is very *improbable*, that a man should be born when he is old. “ He might almost as soon enter his mother’s womb a second time, and be born.”

Let these considerations, therefore, determine you to seek “ the Lord while he may be found, and to call upon him while he is near.” Let nothing prevail with you to defer the important work. Suffer not yourselves to indulge a meaner flame, till you have first loved him. Secure an interest in the Redeemer in preference to any worldly interest ; and whatever you do, *remember your Creator*. “ To know the God of your fathers, and to serve him with a perfect heart, and a willing mind,” will afford you a satisfaction which the world can neither give, nor take away.

Religion, my young friends, is not that formidable

formidable object which perhaps your af-frighted imaginations would make it. Did it, in any sense, answer to the character drawn by its enemies ; did it resemble that, exhibited by its mistaken friends ; I should not wonder you stood aloof. Who would concern himself with such a religion, till the common feelings of humanity had left him ?

But the religion of Jesus is essentially different. Consult the New-Testament with impartiality and candour, and point out the doctrine or precept which looks like an insult upon your reason or understanding. Where is the man but will acknowledge, in his cooler moments, that it is an excellent system, wisely framed to promote our best interest, and to advance the happiness both of society and the individual ? This, even its worst enemies have the generosity to acknowledge ; but *your* misfortune is, that you form your ideas of its genius and nature, not from the glorious gospel itself, but certain extravagant characters among its professors. From some oddities peculiar to them, you draw a strange portrait of the religion they profess ; but how unreasonable a conclusion this ! It were far more philosophical to charge it to the air they breathe,

breathe, the food they eat, or the raiment with which they are clothed. Besides, with what propriety can you go to such characters for an idea of christianity? Who thinks of consulting an hospital for the healthiness of a climate, or a high way for the justice and honesty of its inhabitants? The writings, and the only writings, which will lead you to just conceptions of the christian religion, are the holy scriptures. We are not to inquire, what say the fathers? or, what practise the moderns? but, what do the plain scriptures teach and inculcate? And if you go through *them* with simplicity and godly sincerity, you will find a religion, which may of all others best merit your favourable regards; a religion, according to the language of the heathen, “ necessary to the young; to the aged, comfortable; to the poor, wealth; to the rich, an ornament; to the fortunate, an honour; ennobling to the slave; and exalting to nobility itself.” This is the religion which we preach, and which, we pray God, you may heartily receive. We want to lay no other restraints upon you, than that you refrain from a few necessary things, from those fleshly lusts that war against the soul, from those vices which

which debase your natures, disturb your present enjoyments, and unfit you for that happiness, for which you were designed. "Do yourselves no harm," is the sum and substance of the precepts of the gospel.

How unreasonable, then, the supposition, that to *remember your Creator in the days of your youth*, is at once to deny yourselves every earthly comfort? Mistaken creatures! the very end of religion is to make you happy; happy in this world, and infinitely so beyond the grave. Who, in the name of God, has a right to rejoice, if the true christian has not? What can possibly interrupt *his* enjoyments, whose parent is the King of heaven; his patron the everlasting Father; whose God is the Lord? Though creature comforts fail, still these considerations must be an inexhaustible source of joy, joy unspeakable and full of glory!

Should you reverse the supposition, *that all who were under sin*, were strangers to enjoyment, you would not mistake the truth. The wicked are justly compared "to the troubled sea which knoweth no rest." In the midst of sensual gratifications, how often does that tormentor within disturb you with tem-
perance

perance and the judgment to come? And though you dismiss such thoughts to a more convenient season, how will they return upon you, and molest your gayest moments! But leaving the future consequences out of the question, what fruit have you from those things whereof you ought at all times to be ashamed! Does it, upon reflection, afford you any pleasure, that you have indulged the passions at the expense of reason, the distinguishing ornament of your nature? That you have substituted evil for good, or good for evil; that you have confounded light with darkness, and darkness with light? Do you feel a conscious dignity when, quitting your own kind, you participate in *their* enjoyments with the brute creation? But I do them an injury; *they* answer the ends of their being; *they* indulge no lusts that war against their peace; *they* crop the tender herb, and slake their thirst at the cool stream.

What then can you promise yourselves, if a vicious life “has neither the promise of the life which now is, nor of that which is to come”? Give the matter a serious examination, and then ask your hearts, whether it were not better, being created but little lower than the angels,

to

to aspire after a happiness inferiour only to theirs ?

I am very sensible of the peculiar disadvantages to which the rising generation is unhappily subjected. We come upon the stage at a time, when every thing that looks like *religion* is turned out of society. *Immorality* is no longer that monster of hideous mein ; the *unprofitable works* of darkness have left their native cell, and appear unmasked at noon day ; *infidelity* increases and multiplies ; and *atheism* is no longer a singularity ! Under such discouragements, no wonder few have sufficient steadiness to stand amid the crowds, and not be carried with the throng.

But notwithstanding the contagion of ill example, there are, we have reason to think, *who remember their Creator in the days of their youth* ; some, even in this society, whose hearts, as far as we can form a judgment, are apparently right with God. And I would cease not to make mention of them in my prayers, giving thanks to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that they have been awaked to a serious consideration, and that their faith is spoken of with decency and respect. Would to God their number was enlarged, that there were daily added to
O them

them of such as shall be saved. O that *he*, who inspects and governs the hearts of all, would send down the healthful influences of his spirit, that he would put an end to the wickedness of the wicked, and “fill the earth with his own knowledge, as the waters fill the sea.”

Upon the whole, let us all be excited to thoughtfulness and consideration. May it be the sober language of our hearts, “what shall we do to be saved?” May we not, by adding iniquity to iniquity, treasure up wrath against the day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God. What avail the momentary joys of time, what avail the pleasures of sense, if they lead to hell, going down to the chambers of death? Can the world, with all its gratifications, give you an equivalent for the future peace, and everlasting happiness of your immortal souls? Be not deceived; God is not mocked; though the Lord God is merciful and gracious, still he is a consuming fire! he *will* take vengeance upon them who know not his law; pour upon them his indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, and destroy them with an everlasting destruction.

Knowing then the terrors of the Lord,
let

let us be persuaded to cleanse our ways by hearkening to his commandments. Let us make haste and delay not ; but do with our might what our hands find to do. Above all, let us not defer, to a dying moment, the vast concerns of eternity. We have before considered the improbability of being brought home in advanced age, of being born when we are old ; let us, therefore, seek him early, if haply we may find him ! The morning of our days is a season peculiarly favourable ; he loves them, that evidence so reasonable a love for him ; and to them an entrance shall be administered most abundantly into the joys of their Lord.

Finally, my brethren, let not the glare of sensual enjoyments, the world itself, the flesh, nor the devil, engross that care, attention and affection which should be ultimately placed on your Creator. Make yourselves early acquainted with his divine character ; improve with diligence the means of grace ; and whatsoever things are true, just, pure, lovely, and of good report, if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on those things.

Sermon IX.

OBLIGATIONS TO PIETY ARISING FROM
A RELIGIOUS EDUCATION.

I CHRONICLES, XXVIII. 9.

KNOW THOU THE GOD OF THY FATHER ; AND
SERVE HIM WITH A PERFECT HEART, AND WITH
A WILLING MIND.

IN this language did David address his illustrious successor, when he was on his death-bed, and in hourly expectation of appearing before God, and giving an account of his administration. He had signed his last will and testament, and settled the weightier affairs of his kingdom ; but still he could not leave the world, without suggesting such counsel as, he imagined, might have a good effect on his successor. At a season so very solemn, he had reason to think, that his counsel would command unusual attention ;

tention ; he, therefore, assembled the princes of Israel, and all the superiour officers of his court, that they might hear his dying injunction, and be witnesses of the temper with which he left the world. No sooner had they come into his presence, than he addressed them in the words which follow : “ Now, therefore, in the audience of our God, keep and seek all the commandments of the Lord, that ye may possess this good land, and leave it for an inheritance for your children after you forever.” Then turning to him, who was to succeed to the throne, he adds : “ And thou, Solomon, my son, know thou the God of thy father ; and serve him with a perfect heart, and a willing mind : for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts. If thou seek him, he will be found of thee ; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off forever.”

Better counsel could not have been given to a young prince ; nor could better advice be suggested to any, who descended from virtuous and religious ancestors ; and who, just entering on life, have their character to form. It is highly expedient to remind young persons of the moral instructions which they have
O 2 received,

received, and of the example which has been set before them. And it is more than ever expedient at this time, because an inattention to the concerns of religion, and a contempt of the principles and practices of our predecessors, seem to have prevailed to an alarming degree. A variety of circumstances has given boldness to impiety ; and I know of no period, when the religious interests of the rising generation demanded a more vigorous support, than at this day.

Under these impressions, I have chosen the counsel of David as the subject of my discourse. And my design is, to urge those, who have descended from parents, eminent for their piety, to “ know the God of their fathers ; and to serve him with a perfect heart, and a willing mind.”

And, in the *first* place, the relation in which you stand to persons of this description, is one argument in favour of early piety. Do not, however, misunderstand me. I do not mean to insinuate, that you should blindly adopt their principles, or follow their practices ; nor was this the idea of David, when he expressed himself as in the text. He only meant, that from experience he could recommend religion as a source of the purest pleasure,
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as the best guide, as the only effectual support in time of adversity, and an unfailing consolation on the bed of death. And, I believe, no one ever made the same choice, without having the same conviction. Could those, who, in all ages, have made the principles of religion their study, and the duties of it their practice, address us from another world, they would assure us, that in keeping the commandments they had found their reward.

That every generation has a right to read and think for itself, is unquestionable. The religious sentiments of our fathers are a proper subject of examination ; and as to their example, we may inquire how far it consisted with their profession. But when we can raise no reasonable objection, either to the one or the other, we ought to reverence their character so much, as to follow their steps. In confirmation of this remark, we have the expostulation of God himself with the nation of Israel : “ Wherefore, I will yet plead with you, saith the Lord, and with your childrens’ children will I plead. For pass over the isles and see, consider diligently if there be such a thing. Hath a nation changed their gods, which are no gods ? But my people have changed
their

their glory for that which doth not profit." That is, take an impartial view of the world ; look among the heathen nations, and convince yourselves how tenacious they are of the religion of their fathers ; but you, in direct opposition to reason, and the influence of education, have exchanged the true religion for a false one,—the true God for vanity and a lie ! The force of the prophet's argument may be easily perceived. He would not be understood, that posterity should adopt all the errors and absurdities of former ages ; but that so much respect is due to the character of those, who have gone before us, as not to abandon their religious principles, without sufficient reason for such conduct. If those who gave us birth were christians ; if they served God with a perfect heart and a willing mind, we are under a special obligation to follow their example.

But, *secondly* ;—the God of our fathers has an additional right to our obedience, because we were solemnly and publicly consecrated to his service. By virtue of a divine institution, we were, in infancy, received into the family of God ; and before many witnesses, we were subjected to the laws of a religion, which proceeded
from

from the Father, was published by the Son, and confirmed by the Spirit. That parents have a natural right to make this consecration, must be allowed ; nor is it any objection, that our inclinations could not be consulted. In the nature of things it was impossible, that the surrender should be our own free act and choice. The same hand, which, without our consent, fed and clothed us, placed us within the reach of blessings far more valuable in themselves, and important to us, if the whole period of our existence be taken into consideration ; and if parental authority was rightfully exercised in the one case, why not in the other ?

Allowing, then, that the early period, in which the solemn consecration was made, does not set aside its obligation, how can young persons feel easy, whilst they live in habitual violation of so sacred a contract ? Upon what principles will they undertake to justify such behaviour ? Would you cancel the engagements, into which those entered, who above all things preferred your immortal interests ? Would you retract what they promised in your behalf ? Would you renounce any obligations to which they subjected you ? If not, be persuaded to make their act your own.

own. Early introduced into the family of God, be careful to demean yourselves as his children. Consider how inexcusable it must be in you to live, as the scripture expresses it, without God ; and to walk according to the course of this world. Ask your hearts, whether a more ingrateful return could be made, either to your heavenly, or your earthly parents ; and realize, that your impiety to the former can be equalled only by your contempt of the latter, when you practically disavow your obligations to lead a sober and virtuous life.

Thirdly ;—the particular advantages with which you have been favoured, in consequence of your religious connexions, give new force to the recommendation in the text. Your education has been a religious one ; you were early taught the way in which you should go, that when you should be old, you might not depart from it. As your understandings opened, the sacred truths of religion were communicated to them ; you received line upon line, and precept on precept. The inspired oracles were put into your hands, as soon as you were capable of comprehending their instructions, or feeling their reproofs. You were early taught to reverence

erence the majesty of heaven ; to avoid all indecent freedoms with his name ; to seek his favour as your chief good ; to make known your wants to him as a parent, and confide in him as a friend ; and to submit all your actions to his laws, from a persuasion, that what he commands, must be right ; and what he forbids, fatal to your interest and happiness. Every measure has been employed to give you a lively sense of the infinite importance of religion, both in regard to the life which now is, and also that which is to come. Such care, you will not deny, was uniformly exercised by those, to whom God had committed the charge of your bodies, and the formation of your minds. And do not such advantages require an adequate return ? Ought not the instructions which you have received, to be treasured up in your hearts, and exhibited in your lives ? Having thus early known your Master's will, are you not under particular obligations to do it ? Would not filial piety, would not common gratitude require such fruits of religion as are suited to your period of life, if you properly considered the hand by which the seeds of virtue were sown ? Solomon observes, that “ a wise son maketh a glad father :”

father :” And in another place, he says, “ My son, if thy heart be wise, my heart shall rejoice, even mine : yea, my reins shall be glad when thy lips speak right things.” Were there no other motive to retain, and follow the instructions received from such an authority, I should think the high gratification of an earthly parent would be sufficient to enforce religious obedience.

But further ;—you have not merely received a virtuous education, a virtuous example has also been set before you. You have seen religion extending its influence from the head to the heart ; and its principal branches reduced to practice. You have been accustomed to expressions of the highest reverence of the great God, of the person and revelation of Christ, of sacred things in general, and of every object connected with religion. It has been your happiness to hear nothing, which would weaken a regard to the truth, or in any respect pollute the mind. Your ears have not been shocked by falsehood and slander, and wounded by filthy or profane conversation. The language which you have heard, and the actions which you have seen, have all tended to inspire a reverence of virtue, and to produce

duce a conviction, that obedience is practicable. Whatsoever things are just, true, pure, lovely, and of good report, have invited your attention, by being carried into life ; and meekness, humility, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity, have been, at the same time, inculcated and exemplified.

For these reasons, you are under particular obligations to know and serve the God of your fathers. — How disingenuous would it be, on your part, to turn aside from a course of virtue, when favoured with doctrines so pure, precepts so perfect, and encouraged by examples so worthy of your imitation. What more could have been done towards the formation of virtuous habits ? Under such cultivation, should you not bring forth the fruits of early piety, you hazard the utmost effects of God's righteous displeasure. For "this will be your condemnation, that the light shone around you ; but you loved darkness rather than light, because your inclinations were evil."

To proceed ;—you, who descended from parents of a virtuous and exemplary character, have enjoyed not only the privilege of a pious education, but also that of the most fervent prayers in your behalf.

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To proceed ;—you, who descended from parents of a virtuous and exemplary character, have enjoyed not only the privilege of a pious education, but also that of the most fervent prayers in your behalf.

How often have you been commended to him, who is able to work in you both to will and to do ; and who has said, My son, give me thy heart ? Of how many petitions has your eternal salvation been the subject ? How often have your earthly parents supplicated their Father and yours, that you might be preserved from the pollutions, which are in the world ; that your tender minds might receive the impressions of religion ; that you might grow in wisdom, as you should grow in years ; and that your peace and happiness in this state of trial might be your earnest of the heavenly blessedness ? With what fervour have they presented these petitions ? And with what sincerity have they appealed to God, that they could have no greater joy, than to see you walking in the truth, as you have received the commandment ?

Affured that you have been thus remembered in their prayers, ought you not to feel your obligation ? In return for their pious solicitude, should you not endeavour to remove their fears, to confirm their hopes, and answer all their reasonable expectations ? Would not a principle of honour dictate such an exertion ? Admitting their cares, their fears,
their

their tenderness on all occasions, but more especially in their daily intercourse with God, would not a disregard to the anxious state of their minds argue the utmost depravity of your own? Can any youth pretend to one sentiment of honour, of gratitude, or even common humanity, who should thus mortify those, who have deserved so different a return?

I have now, in as few words as possible, stated the many privileges, which you enjoy, who descended from christian parents. In a manner as solemn as it was public, you have been consecrated to God; you have enjoyed the benefit of good instruction, and beheld the charms of a good example; every measure has been taken to inspire you with a love of virtue, and a detestation of every false and evil way. From the lips of those, whom nature teaches you to honour, you have heard no vain or licentious conversation; your native abhorrence of falsehood, detraction, and impiety, has not been weakened by any thing proceeding from a source so reverend. But, on the contrary, every sentiment which has been uttered in your hearing, has had an obvious tendency to make you wiser and better. Finally, you have been most affectionately remembered.

remembered before the throne of grace ; and every temporal and spiritual blessing has been implored in your behalf.

Let these considerations excite you to pay an early attention to those things which belong to your peace. “ Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, whilst the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when you will say, you have no pleasure in them.” Recollect the many instructions, which you have received ; and the pious and virtuous example by which those instructions have been enforced ; and let it be your future study to follow those who have gone before you, so far as they were followers of Christ. Consider the guilt which you will contract, if all these lessons of virtue be given you in vain. Slighting so many advantages, and resisting so many motives to a good life, you will probably go on from one degree of vice to another ; and in the same measure in which you have been exalted by your privileges, will you be punished for their neglect or abuse.

Such behaviour in those, who have received a virtuous education, will prejudice religion in a far greater degree than the vices of others. It is natural to expect, that the children of irreligious parents

parents should follow their steps ; destitute of instruction, and perverted by example, it is scarcely conceivable that they should pursue a virtuous course. Religion, therefore, is not disgraced by their profligacy ; but it is deeply wounded by the apostacy of those, who have been taught to reverence its laws, and who have been urged to obedience both by instruction and example. Such a departure from the principles of a good education, furnishes the enemies of religion with arguments against it ; and it creates a natural suspicion, that the children would not have been so immoral, if the piety of the parents had not been a pretence, and their professions hypocritical and vain. Nothing, it is true, can be more unjust than this insinuation ; but how often is it thrown out, when facts, like those which I have described, furnish an occasion ?

If you regard the reputation of those, who stand in the honourable relation of parents, you will therefore remember their moral instructions ; and, if you would have compassion on yourselves, you will carry them into practice. It is the language of the blessed God—" I love them, who love me ; and those who seek

me early shall find me ;” and sooner would heaven and earth pass away, than this promise remain unaccomplished. If you sincerely devote yourselves to his service, and resign yourselves up to his disposal, there is nothing which you may not hope from his mercy. You may approach him at all times as your father and friend ; depend upon him as the guide of your youth, and the support of your riper years ; a present help in time of trouble ; your guide to and through death ; and beyond the grave, your everlasting portion.

On the other hand, what must be the consequence of rejecting the good principles, which have been instilled into your minds ; and walking according to the course of this evil world ? You will inflict a deep wound in the bosoms of those, who have vainly attempted to promote your spiritual interest ; you will bring disgrace on your virtuous connexions ; you will expose the cause of truth to the most impious derision ; and your fate beyond the grave will verify the words of the apostle : “ Better had it been not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after you have known it, to turn
aside

afide from the holy commandment, which was delivered unto you."

In this difcourse, it is taken for granted, that juſtice is done to the riſing generation, by thoſe to whom they have been conſigned by the over-ruling providence of God. This is a concern of infinite importance ; no one duty can come in competition with it. Let me, therefore, intreat you, who have young minds to form by your precepts and example, to be faithful to your charge ; bring them up, as you have ſolemnly engaged, in the nurture and admonition of the Lord ; make them early acquainted with the truths and duties of the goſpel ; and having taught them what is right and fit, let them ſee that you feel the weight of your own inſtructions. Precept without example will rather prejudice, than ſerve, the cauſe of religion. Say, then, with the devout monarch, I will walk before my houſe with a perfect heart. And let the conduct of every parent towards his offspring be ſuch that he may partake of the ſublime commendation, which was beſtowed on the patriarch : " I know him, that he will command his children and houſehold after him, and they ſhall keep the way of the Lord." *Amen.*

Sermon X.

OBEDIENCE TO GOD THE BEST METHOD
OF SECURING THE FAVOUR OF MEN.

LUKE II. 52.

AND JESUS INCREASED IN WISDOM, AND
STATURE, AND IN FAVOUR WITH GOD
AND MAN.

RESPECTING the private life, and early childhood of our blessed Saviour, very little has been disclosed in the sacred pages. Upon this subject, the inspired historians, either were not themselves sufficiently informed ; or they have not thought proper to gratify a natural, and, I may venture to say, an innocent curiosity. Those facts, which essentially concern the character of Christ, and furnish the only conclusive evidence of his divine mission, they have minutely related.

ted. No one can complain that they have omitted any one thing which a good christian ought to know, in order the more effectually to discharge his duty ; and to work out his eternal salvation. But as we have understandings to be informed, we have also a curiosity to be gratified. Who would not wish to know something more of the private history of our Saviour than is to be learned from those sacred records which are in use among christians ? Is it not a natural inquiry—what was his personal appearance, what the circumstances and employment of his youth ? What early proofs did he give of his qualifications for the important office to which he was appointed ? What proficiency did he make in knowledge, and by what methods was he advanced in the science of God, and true religion ? How did he employ himself when arrived at man's estate ? What were the sentiments of his acquaintance concerning him ? In what manner did they converse with him, and how conduct towards Christ ? These are questions, which we can scarcely forbear to ask, though we must despair of a satisfactory answer.

One circumstance, however, has been recorded

recorded by the evangelist Luke, which throws some light upon the preceding inquiry. He says, that, at twelve years of age, he went up to Jerusalem, and there distinguished himself among the Doctors by such a degree of wisdom and penetration as far exceeded his years ; that he very early understood the design on which he came into the world ; that as he grew in years, he became remarkable for his wisdom and stature, advancing gradually in the former as well as the latter ; and that by the comeliness of his person, the sweetness of his disposition, and the uncommon vigour of his faculties, he engaged the affections of all who had the happiness to be acquainted with him. “ And Jesus, says the evangelist, increased in wisdom and stature, *and in favour with God and man.*”

My intention, in the choice of these words, is to show,—that our reputation among men will be best promoted by our obedience to God ; that religion and human applause are not at variance ; and that a youth, in particular, cannot take a more effectual method to attract their admiration, and endear himself to his fellow-creatures, than by steadily doing those things which are lawful and right. Upon
this

this subject I should not think it necessary to insist, had not very different sentiments been propagated in the world. The art of pleasing has been reduced to a system. How to grow in favour with man has been taught by rule. But among all the directions furnished by the most applauded masters of the present age, we find none relating to God, and the practice of christian duty. So far from it, perfidy, lying, and debauchery have been recommended as graces, which a man ought to cultivate, in order to finish his character, and to qualify him to please. And if not directly affirmed, yet it has been too plainly hinted, that those acts of religion, upon which depends the favour of God, will rather obstruct than procure the applause of mankind.

Were it a thing impossible, at the same time, to grow *in favour with God and man*, no reasonable being could hesitate one moment what course he ought to take. Better were it to be an object of universal detestation among men, than to incur the displeasure of God. The former can do us no lasting injury, but every thing depends on the friendship of our Maker. Human vengeance can pursue us no farther than to the grave; but the vengeance
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of heaven can follow us into another state, and imbitter any future period of existence. Whether, therefore, we are most earnestly to desire the favour of God or man, cannot be a serious question with a reasonable being.

But so far from being at variance, the favour of God, and the love of mankind, are closely connected. If we do those things which are pleasing to our Maker, we shall naturally endear ourselves to our fellow-men. On the other hand, if we practise those virtues, which inspire the admiration, and excite the applause of society, we shall by the same acts become favourites with God. Religion is the great art of pleasing universally; and every youth, who, as he increases in years, increases in religion, will, at the same time, commend himself to God, and to the consciences of all in his sight.

Accordingly, we read of Samuel, that “he grew on, and was in favour both with the Lord, and also with men.” His piety and early virtues endeared him to the Jews, whilst they rendered him the special care and favourite of heaven. And knowing how naturally the love of God and man would follow the same virtues, and rest on the same object, the wise prince

prince admonishes the youth of his day in the following words: "My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments: For length of days, and long life, and peace shall they add to thee. Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck, write them upon the table of thine heart, so shalt thou find favour, and good understanding in the sight of God and man." And not unlike this is the observation of the apostle: "For he that in these things serveth Christ, is acceptable to God, and approved of men." From hence it appears that the favour of God and man are not incompatible; a certain course of action will be well pleasing in the sight of our Maker; and the same line of conduct will generally and eventually procure the friendship of the world.

Our Saviour was beloved because his early youth was distinguished by many exalted virtues. We read, that he was subject to his parents, notwithstanding the superiority of his character and origin to theirs; and herein his example appears divinely attractive. We are also informed that, with his stature, he increased in wisdom; a circumstance which does him no less honour. Though the scriptures

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have

have been no more particular, yet we may, from the hints here given, safely conclude, that Christ was remarkably amiable in his manners, and disposition, prudent in his behaviour, and that filial piety, and piety towards God spread a lustre over his whole character. These excellencies engaged the affections of all who were acquainted with his merit ; and a still higher honour afterwards attended them ; for we read, “ that a voice came from heaven, saying, this is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased.”

To be beloved by God and man is, and ought to be, esteemed the greatest of all possible honours. He is no christian, with whom it is not an object to procure the approbation of his Maker, and the good opinion of his fellow-creatures ; and that youth wants a most important recommendation, who is not earnestly desirous to grow wise as he grows in years, and to enter on the public stage with a deserved reputation. Presuming that every one present has too much understanding to be indifferent in a matter of such importance, I shall proceed to lay down such rules as appear to me to have the united sanction of reason, and the gospel.

And

And, in the *first* place, in order to obtain the favour of God, which is life, and that good name, which is better than much riches, a youth should early cultivate a most profound respect for the character and authority of God. Without this, it will be impossible to please. God is a being with whom we all have to do ; he is our creator, preserver, benefactor, moral governour, and final judge. Thus related to the supreme majesty of the universe, there is a sense in which he should be in all our thoughts ; and the youth in particular should cultivate an early sense of his being, perfections, providence, universal presence, and governing authority. He should habituate his mind to love, fear, and reverence him ; and he should earnestly endeavour to perform all those duties, which more immediately relate to God. With these religious sentiments, habits, and offices, God will be well pleased ; the subject of them he will regard with a favourable eye ; and the youth will grow in favour as he grows in these eminent virtues.

But if early piety be a recommendation to God, it will not fail to ensure the affection of men. Is there a man who would not be agreeably impressed with
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such fair beginnings of honour and virtue in a young actor on the public stage? Would the youth be less respected for attending the worship of God, and paying Him those outward marks of respect, which are enjoined by the gospel, and the laws of his country? Would a corresponding seriousness of manners, and circumspection of behaviour, provoke the contempt of any, even of fools themselves? Would a youth appear to a disadvantage, should he have too much reverence for God to profane his name? In short, would any appearances of real and rational religion render him less acceptable to his fellow-men? By no means. The same course of action, by which he honoured God, would reflect honour on himself; the same piety, by which he pleased his Maker, would exalt him in the eyes of others; and cultivating the devotion of his Saviour, like him, he would, at the same time, *grow in favour both with God and man.*

Secondly.—In order to accomplish this desirable object, to a reverence of God you will carefully add the practice of righteousness. Moral honesty is a virtue of the last importance; not only the happiness, but the very existence of society

ety in a great measure depends upon it. You will, therefore, begin the world with a resolution to do justly, and love mercy ; the great rule of doing to others, as you would they should do to you, you will carefully impress upon your mind ; and in all your dealings, you will early habituate yourselves to take no unlawful advantage, to practise no unworthy arts, to deceive no man, but conscientiously to speak, and to do, however others might conduct in like cases. Such integrity will be highly pleasing in the sight of God. The righteous Lord loveth righteousness, and his countenance beholdeth the upright. Moral honesty is expected of God universally from all his creatures ; he is the common parent of mankind, and will not suffer one to injure another : he has, therefore, solemnly enjoined the great rule of equity ; he has inscribed it upon our hearts, and re-published it in his word ; and he has given us plainly to understand, that the practice of righteousness is more acceptable to him, than whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.

In order, then, to grow in favour with God, you must possess yourselves of a principle of integrity, and must act upon this principle in all your transactions with

your fellow-men ; and how essentially this will exalt you in their eyes, you need not be told. It has become a common maxim, that “an honest man is the noblest work of God ;” certainly, those are highly esteemed, who are eminent for their integrity ; they have the confidence and veneration of their fellow-creatures ; they are beloved whilst living, and gratefully remembered when no more. Such being the natural fruit of distinguished honesty, you will be careful to practise it, not only as a moral duty, but as the most efficacious art of pleasing ; for a strict regard to the rules of justice cannot fail to procure you favour both with God and man.

Thirdly.—With integrity you will unite gentleness of manners, civility, a disposition to oblige, and a respectful mode of behaviour towards all mankind. Good manners is an indispensable duty ; a man may be perfectly honest and perfectly well-bred ; these virtues do by no means interfere. It is very possible to treat all men with respect, and, at the same time, to do them strict justice on all occasions ; for these reasons, you will not overlook the laws of civility ; but as all men are the workmanship of God, you will honour all

all men, paying however a more profound respect to the more deserving.

Such behaviour will meet the approbation of God, whilst its impress on men will be highly grateful. Who is not pleased with the civility of the youth who accosted our Saviour in those respectful terms, "Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" We are told, that he kneeled before him, when he proposed this question ; and that our Saviour, beholding him, loved him. It was his decency and propriety of manners which attracted the blessed Jesus ; and as attractive will they be in the eyes of all. A respectful mode of behaviour to others will make them happy, and in return will conciliate their esteem ; for it is natural to all to love their benefactors.

Fourthly.—To please God, and enter the world with honour, industry and moderation are indispensably necessary on the part of youth ; it is a melancholy reflection, that so little attention is paid to this subject. In a young country, where we can so ill afford to lose time, and where there are such urgent calls for labour, both of body and mind, it is inexcusable in any to waste their lives in sloth or pleasure ; and that parent may hereafter

after expect a heavy condemnation, who has laid the foundation of their ruin, by not bringing up his children to some honest employment. Many, who are now a burden on society, would have been an honour to it had they been early habituated to labour. Habits of industry are as easily formed as any other ; and that they were not formed, must be owing to some great and inexcusable neglect.

The day-labourer, who earns an honest livelihood, is a far more respectable character than he who enjoys the benefits of society without making any return ; nothing can argue a meaner and more abject mind than to be willing to contract such a debt. It was the design of God that every man should be usefully occupied. Even our first parents, when in a state of innocence, had a task assigned them ; they were put into the garden, not merely to gather its fruits, but to till and dress it ; and so pointed is the scripture against idleness, that we are assured by an apostle, that “ if any man would not work, neither should he eat.”

It follows, therefore, that a youth, in order to set out right, should not waste the morning of life ; he should early accustom himself either to bodily or mental labour,

labour, according as his circumstances or inclination shall lead him. As a member of society, it should be his ambition to be not merely inoffensive, but positively useful ; he should be willing to make some return for the protection, and other blessings enjoyed ; in a word, he should have too much spirit to be a mere cypher among his fellow-creatures. Such zeal to do some good in the world would not pass unnoticed ; society would do honour to the virtues of such a young member. He would appear in the eyes of all far more respectable than those sons of pleasure, who have no other employment than to eat, and drink, and rise up to play. And in regard to the God of heaven, we know that they are in high favour with him, who are not slothful in business, but fervent in spirit, and active in every branch of duty.

Finally.—To endear yourselves still more to God and man, and to confirm yourselves in their affection, have resolution to make an early profession of christianity, and to live conformably to that profession. The gospel of Christ is a most excellent system ; no words can describe the advantages, which a well disposed youth may reap from it ; no tongue can express our obligations

obligations to God for this inestimable blessing. Having before you the doctrines, precepts, and example of the blessed Jesus, you may daily increase in wisdom and virtue, your path shining more and more to the perfect day.

Be persuaded, therefore, to brighten the morning of life by the profession and practice of christianity. Among all the different denominations of christians, some there are, surely, with which you can unite ; I know not that a perfect coincidence of sentiment is necessary for religious communion. Having, then, testified to the world that you are not ashamed of the gospel, endeavour to imbibe its spirit, and to obey its laws. Frequently call up to view the example of Christ, and make it your great concern, to walk as he walked. In the same degree in which you resemble the Son of God, you will be in favour with God and man.

Thus have I endeavoured to point out the true art of conciliating the affection of God, and procuring a good name in the world. May I hope that you will take these things into serious consideration ? It is a great point to begin well ; many have been wrong all their days, because they did not set out right at first.

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If, therefore, it be your earnest desire to begin life with honour, to secure the favour of God, and to obtain a good reputation among men, do not slight the admonitions which have now been given you on this subject. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom ;" wherefore, let his fear rule in your hearts, and govern your actions. Be careful to speak the truth always, and to be just and honourable in all your dealings. Behave with that modesty and circumspection which are so proper at all times, particularly at your period of life. Early engage in some honest profession, and do with your might what your hands find to do. Finally, aspire to the character of a christian, a character the most honourable that a mortal can sustain. If you do these things, you will never fall ; God will be your friend and preserver ; his ever-watchful eye will be continually upon you, and his bounty will supply your wants. You will, moreover, have an honest fame among men, upon which, reason will tell you to set a proper value. You will be the ornament of society ; to your parents and friends, your growing virtues will afford unspeakable satisfaction ; you will have peace in your own minds ;

minds ; you will be prepared for life, whatever it may bring ; and ready for death, whenever it shall come. When you fail here, you will be received into everlasting habitations ; and a life consecrated to religion and virtue, will be attended with an exceeding and eternal weight of glory. *Amen.*

Sermon XI.

YOUTHFUL SOBRIETY.

TITUS II. 6.

YOUNG MEN LIKEWISE EXHORT TO BE
SOBER-MINDED.

THE advantages of early piety are so numerous, and so great, that we cannot wonder the gospel takes particular notice of young persons ; that it addresses some of its most emphatic warnings and admonitions to them, and discovers an invariable solicitude for their welfare. To a parent, to a friend of society, to a professor of religion, to any man of sober reflection, no sight can be more attractive than a youth sincerely devoted to his Creator. In the contemplation of such an object, there is superiour joy among the angels of heaven. I will even venture

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to say, that Jesus Christ and God his Father are peculiarly delighted with it ; and that the time will come, when they will manifest their approbation in a manner, which we can neither conceive nor describe.

This being an undoubted truth, I need not apologize for the subject of this discourse. To the aged I need not excuse it ; nor will the young suppose it unnecessary, since the importance of early piety has been so often pressed upon them, and they have been so lately from this very place exhorted to give their first fruits to the Lord, and by one who was once young, and is now old, from whose aged lips this exhortation must come with peculiar force. At every period of life, we need line upon line, and precept upon precept. Though we are not to be informed of our duty, still it is necessary that our minds be stirred up by way of remembrance. Even in the apostolic age, the christians needed frequent admonitions relative to their duty. At this day, then, no exhortation to piety and virtue can be thought unseasonable ; and least of all can the youth imagine, that he stands not in any need of those solemn admonitions, which so often occur in the word of God.

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The words, which furnish the subject of this discourse, were addressed by the apostle Paul to one whom he styles his own son after the common faith. Devoted to the work of the ministry, he directs him how to discharge the duties of his office, and particularly, how to address the several characters which might compose the church, over which he presided. The aged (says he) exhort to be sober, grave, temperate : the aged women to behave in a manner becoming holiness : the young women to love their husbands and their children ; to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, and submissive to an authority which is seldom exercised but in the gentlest manner. He adds : “ *Young men likewise exhort to be sober-minded ; in all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works.*”

The duty here recommended shall—*First*—employ our attention.

And—*Secondly*—the various motives by which it may be urged.

This will prepare the way for such directions relative to the moral conduct of youth, such representations of early piety, such displays of its pleasures and advantages, as may tend to confirm those who are already prepossessed in favour of religion,

ligion, and to reclaim such as have wandered from it.

First.—I shall consider the duty enjoined upon young persons ; and that is, *to be sober-minded*. The literal meaning of the Greek word is—*to govern their sensual and angry passions*. These being peculiarly incident to youth, the apostle thought it necessary to warn them of their danger, by urging a particular restraint upon those passions, of the dishonour and tendency of which, they might not be sufficiently aware. But though the original would confine me to these two excesses, I shall give larger scope to this apostolic direction. I shall consider the duty enjoined in its greatest extent ; and as such, recommend it to the pious observation of my young friends.

And to prevent all mistakes, I would first observe,—that it was not the intention of the apostle to discountenance all those pleasures and pursuits which are so inviting to youth, and which produce no ill effect, either upon the body or mind ; by extending the prohibition to these, many have actually diserved the cause of religion. There are pleasures suited to the young, and there are enjoyments, calmer, perhaps, and more rational, suited to

to the aged ; and while these are moderately pursued, we commit no offence against the Author of our being, do no injury to our animal or rational part, nor unfit ourselves for pleasures more noble, and more lasting.

What the inspired apostle would inculcate upon the young is an habitual reverence for the divine character ; a conscientious discharge of the several duties of religion ; continual watchfulness against those tumultuous passions, and fleshly lusts, which equally war against the soul ; in fine, an unreserved consecration of all the powers and faculties to the service of God, and the practice of piety. All this is included in christian sobriety, and it may perfectly consist with a moderate participation of all the real pleasures and amusements of life.

First ;—you should cultivate an habitual reverence for the Supreme Being. This is the direction of the wise man : “ Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.” He means that you should remember him with reverence and godly fear, with gratitude and love ; remember him as a father,

er, a benefactor, and a friend ; and could you habituate yourselves to view him in this light, you would not need a more powerful motive to keep his commandments.

For want of these high and honourable conceptions of their Supreme Parent ; for want of a reverential respect for his character, young persons are often betrayed into levity and profaneness. On the most trivial occasions they dare to invoke his sacred name ; notwithstanding his absolute prohibition, they make no scruple of taking it in vain, whenever it shall appear like a display of wit, or give emphasis to their frothy conversation. Convinced of the danger of such impiety and its folly, do you conduct with more decency towards the best as well as greatest of beings ; remember him with reverence, gratitude, and love ; so shall you grow in favour with him as you grow in years. *He* will be your God, and *you* the distinguished objects of his care and protection.

Secondly ;—to be sober-minded, you must lay a restraint upon those lusts and passions to which others too freely indulge, and present your bodies an unpolluted sacrifice to God, which is your reasonable service. Little will it avail to re-
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member your Creator, unless you avoid those sensual excesses, which he has branded with perpetual infamy, and declared the objects of his utter abhorrence. Why were you indued with reason? Why were you raised above the brute creation? Was it that you might sink yourselves below them by depraving every noble faculty of the mind? that you might outdo them in sensual indulgences? that you might, in other words, destroy the nature which God had given you? The powers and faculties bestowed upon the human kind are a proof, that “rioting and drunkenness, chambering and wantonness,” were not the end and aim of their being. These guilty excesses ought not once to be named among those who boast that there is a “spirit in man; and that the inspiration of the Almighty hath given him understanding.” Wherefore, let it be your great care to *flee youthful lusts*, since you cannot let them have dominion over you without the utmost hazard and disgrace.

Thirdly;—to be *sober-minded*, you should not only be uncontaminated by the *grosser* pollutions which are in the world; but you should be habitually circumspect in your life and conversation; the fear of the

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the Lord should rule in your hearts ; and you should have respect to all his commandments. This is agreeable to the advice of David, when he addressed the young prince, his son, upon the subject of his duty, his interest, and his happiness. “ And thou, Solomon, my son, know thou the God of thy fathers, and serve him with a perfect heart, and a willing mind.” Obedience is certainly included in the duty under consideration ; for how can that youth be sober-minded, how can *he* have the sober exercise of his reason, who dares insult the authority of a Being, whose approbation would raise him to heaven, but whose frowns would sink him to instant despair !

Convinced of the danger and folly of disobedience, let it be your pious concern to live like reasonable beings ; and to adorn the doctrine of your blessed Saviour by a temper resembling his own, and a course of action conformable to his laws. “ Think on your ways, and turn your feet into the divine testimonies ; make haste and delay not to keep his commandments.” The gospel affords you the most excellent rules of duty ; its Author the most glorious example. Instructed by the one, and attracted by the other, do you, therefore,

therefore, yield yourselves up to the service of your Maker ; let it be the care and business of your life to please him ; adopt the language and resolution of the psalmist, “ I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments. Depart from me, ye evil doers, for I will keep the commandments of my God.”

Having thus considered the course of behaviour, virtually recommended by the apostle, when he exhorts you to be *sober-minded*, I proceed, in the *Second* place, to the various motives by which it may be urged. And it is a consideration, which ought to have due weight with young persons, that early piety will give singular pleasure to their parents, their friends, and to all who feel interested in their honour and welfare. “ A wise son maketh a glad father : but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother.” A parent, who has any sense of religion on his mind, can have no greater joy than to “ see his children walk in the truth.” This he will esteem an ample reward for all his pious care and instruction. Whatever expence has been bestowed in forming their morals, improving their manners, and cultivating their minds, he will not think

think it unnecessary, or ill-bestowed, while it produces the happy fruits of early piety and virtue.

If then there be any gratitude or ingenuity in the human breast, think on these things. If there be any love and mercy, fulfil ye the joy of those, whose happiness so much depends upon your conduct in life. Why would you wound them to whom you are under such lasting obligations? Why would you fill their eyes with tears, or their hearts with sorrow? Why would you cover their faces with shame? Why bring down their grey hairs with sorrow to the grave? Be assured you never inflict a deeper wound upon their souls than when you walk in the way of your own heart, and in the sight of your eyes. Such a return for their care and sollicitude, is ingrateful; such an abuse of their kindness is a crime which wants a name.

But another motive to sobriety in early life is the present honour it will confer upon you; and the happiness it will yield. By denying ungodliness, and sensual lusts, and living soberly in the world, you sacrifice no real enjoyment, you subject yourselves to no loss which you will ever feel. The restraints of religion are no arbitrary

arbitrary restrictions of your liberty ; nor are the laws of it mere tests of your obedience. God has enjoined one action, and prohibited another, because there is a natural tendency in the former to render you honourable and happy, and in the latter to sink you into misery and disgrace.

Sensible of this, the wise man has described true religion in the following poetic strains : “ Length of days is in her right hand, and in her left riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to them who lay hold on her ; and happy is every one that retaineth her.” This is not a mere poetic flight ; it is a matter of fact, that a life of religion is a life of real pleasure ; and that youth who devotes the morning of his days to the service of God, will certainly find that he has been wise for this world, and wise for the world to come. In the eyes of the more discerning part of mankind he will appear to singular advantage ; even among the sons of dissipation he will command respect ; his breast will never be tormented by the lashes of an unapproving conscience ; when he retires to his pillow, his slumber will

will not be disturbed by the guilty scenes which have dishonoured the day past. Innocence, injured and betrayed, will never assail his ear with her just reproaches ; nor will his serious moments be all embittered by the reflection, that he has introduced shame and infamy into the habitation of honour. In short, he, that remembers his Creator in the days of his youth, will be a stranger to all the guilty fears which torment wicked men, to all their self-reproaches, to all their distressing expectations beyond this life. The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, will be the present reward of his virtue ; and he will confidently expect more distinguishing honour and happiness in a better world.

Thirdly.—Early piety has this further advantage, that it naturally leads to the highest moral attainments. Virtue is progressive ; like the morning sun, the path of the just man shines more and more to the perfect day. He that in the morning of life devotes himself to the service of God, and the duties of religion, will soon become remarkably useful and exemplary. It was said of an antient prophet, that “ *he feared the Lord greatly* ” ; the reason assigned is, that “ *he feared him* from

from his youth." The same effect will naturally be produced by the same cause. Do you in this early period of life habituate yourselves to the way in which you should go, and when you are old you will not depart from it ; the duties of religion will become daily more delightful ; if you love your Saviour now, you will love him still more ; if you now serve him with cheerfulness, the time will come, when obedience to his laws will constitute your highest felicity ; every virtue you now possess will acquire strength and vigour, till you arrive at the stature of perfect men in Jesus Christ. The amiable youth will become the still more amiable man ; the young patriot will be the ornament of his country ; and the young saint (if he perseveres) the most splendid christian.

Finally ;—early piety is recommended by this additional, and most interesting consideration, that it is peculiarly pleasing to God, and to Jesus Christ ; and that it will lay a foundation for superiour honour and happiness in the heavenly world. "I remember the kindness of thy youth," says the Supreme Being to his chosen people ; and it is a matter of fact, that the youngest was the disciple whom Jesus

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loved. Religion in every age is attractive ; but in youth it certainly wears a most pleasing form : besides, through the grace of the gospel, it will entitle, and, according to the natural course of things, it will qualify for an unspeakable and eternal weight of glory. It stands to reason, that *he* who has made the greatest moral attainments shall enjoy the highest felicity ; the blessedness of heaven grows out of the particular state of our minds ; for which reason, the youth who consecrates his early powers to God and the duties of religion, as he will far outshine others in holiness, so will his future joys be far superiour to theirs.

And are not these motives sufficient to induce you to flee youthful lusts, and to order your conversation according to the gospel ? Have you any sentiment of affection for those who stand in the relation of earthly parents ? Are you desirous to repay their kindness, by making the evening of their days comfortable and happy ? Have you any regard to the good opinion of mankind ? Are your own honour and interest an object worthy of your attention ? Is it a matter of importance to secure the approbation of your heavenly Father, and the everlasting joys of the future

future world ? If glory, honour, and immortality have any attractives in your eyes, you certainly will “ think on your ways, you will delay not to keep the divine commandments.”

The word of God affords you the amplest instruction ; study that word with particular attention, more especially the practical discourses of our blessed Saviour. He was a preacher of righteousness ; he spake as never man spake ; wherefore listen to him as one who hath the words of everlasting life ; and endeavour to copy the virtues and graces which so adorn his character. The more you pursue it, the more delightful will the study become ; the more you contemplate, the more will you admire his example.

While you thus endeavour to draw divine instruction from the oracles of truth, avoid the society of those who would efface every virtuous impression ; such there are in the world, and against the pernicious influence of their conversation, and example, you cannot be sufficiently on your guard. “ My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not : ” “ Evil communications corrupt good manners.” Your best impressions will be effaced, your best resolutions will be defeated,

feated, while you frequent the society of fools, and chuse those for your companions, who make a mock at sin, who are devoid of all principle, and destitute of every commendable quality.

Be frequent, serious, and fervent in all the offices of devotion ; diligently attend the public worship of your Maker, and listen with candour to those instructions which are reiterated every Lord's day ; bear in mind the deceitfulness of sin, and the difficulty with which vicious habits of long standing are ever subdued. " Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots ?—then may ye also do good, who are accustomed to do evil."

Finally.—Realize the shortness of life and its uncertainty, that youth and health are no security against the arrests of death. Do not promise yourselves many years to come, for you know not what a day may bring forth ; ten thousand dangers lurk around you ; your life is but a vapour, your days a hand-breadth, your years a tale that is told, your best estate altogether vanity : Wherefore, attend to the things which belong to your peace, before they are hidden from your eyes.

To enforce the exhortation of the apostle I might suggest many other arguments,

ments, and by force of reason I might convince you, that it is the part of wisdom to be sober-minded. Permit me to take a shorter course ; let me apply to your moral sense ; let me exhibit a vicious and virtuous character, leave you to compare them, and to draw the conclusion.

With powers and faculties capable of the best improvement, and sufficient to render him an ornament and blessing to society, *Improbis* early betook himself to the most vicious courses. For his companions he chose the idle and profane ; by them instructed, and encouraged by their example, he soon plunged himself in those guilty excesses which are equally fatal to fortune and to reputation, to body and to mind. Behold him now the victim to intemperance and debauchery ; his connexions shrink from him as one who is a disgrace to their family and name. His parents, they, alas ! have long since fallen under the accumulated dishonour which his vices have brought upon them ; their grey hairs he has brought down with sorrow to the grave. Tormenting thought ! But this is not all : he is racked with bodily pains, the fruits of his criminal excesses ; human art can

afford no relief ; his only prospect is to live despised, and die unlamented !

From an object so humiliating, let me now call off your attention. Behold a different character, the virtuous and amiable *Eugenio*. With equal powers, and equal advantages he entered life ; by a wise improvement of them, he early acquired a store of useful knowledge, and thus became qualified to discharge his various duties, as a christian, a citizen, as a man. Devoted to his Creator, from the time he became capable of reflection, he happily escaped the pollutions which are in the world through the contagion of ill example ; and intent upon business, he had no leisure for those criminal pursuits which are so inviting in this age of folly and dissipation. Behold him now the delight of his parents, the pride of his connexions, the ornament of society. The wise and good behold him with pleasure ; his acquaintance is courted by all who can distinguish a man of principle from a fool. He is happy in the approbation of conscience ; happy in the approbation of the world ; and still happier in the approbation of his God. In the present state, he expects his full share of human enjoyment ; in the state approaching,

proaching, superiour and everlasting felicity.

To you I now appeal which of these objects is most inviting. Survey them at your leisure ; contrast, compare them ; and if upon due examination it appear that every advantage is on the side of virtue, make *Eugenio* your pattern—Go and do likewise !

Sermon XII.

CHARACTER OF DANIEL RECOMMENDED
TO THE IMITATION OF YOUTH.

DANIEL x. 11.

DANIEL, A MAN GREATLY BELOVED.

IT is the advice of an inspired apostle, that we “take the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience.” This counsel deserves our serious attention; we may find great entertainment in contemplating those excellent characters, which adorn the page of revelation; and we may derive the most useful instruction from a survey of those trials and virtues which have rendered them the admiration of the world.

Among the eminently great and good men, whom we are exhorted to take for
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an example, the prophet Daniel deserves a conspicuous place. He was a descendant from the kings of Judah ; and for this reason might be distinguished from other captives by the royal favour. In the prophecy of Isaiah, we read, " Behold the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store until this day, shall be carried to Babylon : nothing shall be left, saith the Lord. And of thy sons, which shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away ; and they shall be officers in the palace of the king of Babylon." This prediction was addressed to Hezekiah ; and was accomplished, when Daniel and three others were destined to receive a princely education, to be fed from the monarch's table, and to attend on his person.

Daniel is mentioned with great respect by the Jewish historian ; he styles him " one of the greatest of the prophets : " and he further observes, that he " not only predicted events, like other prophets, but also assigned the precise time of their accomplishment." Our Saviour, likewise, mentions him with great respect ; and if we attend to the subject of his prophecies, namely, the coming and sufferings

ferings of Christ, and the great events which would precede the gospel age, we must consider Daniel as one of the most eminent of an order, destined to look into futurity ; and, by prophetic communications, to comfort and instruct mankind.

Under Nebuchadnezzar, and his successors, he lived in great favour ; and his uncommon merits conciliated the friendship of Darius and Cyrus. It is computed, that he was twenty years of age, when carried into captivity ; that, in the course of ten years afterwards, he had an established reputation for wisdom and piety ; and that he had nearly attained to an hundred years, when he died. This short account of Daniel, I thought necessary, as an introduction to the following discourse.

In the text, he is addressed as ^a a man greatly beloved. That he merited this distinguishing honour ; in other words, that he deserved to be greatly beloved, will clearly appear, if we attend to his history, as far as the particulars of it may be collected from the sacred volume. I shall, therefore, proceed to investigate the superiour excellencies which adorned his character, in order that we may be
delighted,

delighted, instructed, and persuaded by it.

First.—It is impossible not to admire his conscientious scruples, when selected with three others to receive an honourable education, and to experience the royal bounty. That they might be qualified to serve their prince, orders were given, that they should be instructed in the language and science of the Chaldeans ; and that, during three years, they should be fed from the king's table ; and should drink of his wine. This flattering distinction, however, was very unacceptable to Daniel ; that, which he esteemed his duty, he wisely preferred to any sensual gratifications ; he, therefore, intreated that he and his friends might be permitted to eat pulse, and to drink water, their religion forbidding them to partake of the dainties provided for a monarch. After some difficulty the request was granted ; and Daniel had the satisfaction, without offending his royal benefactor, to preserve his conscience undefiled.

Such a strict regard to duty, in a person so young, and under circumstances so trying, must be considered as an earnest of those accomplishments, which rendered the prophet greatly beloved. To persons
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just entering life, I would, therefore, propose this truly excellent example. In imitation of Daniel, purpose within your own hearts, that conscience shall be your guide, and that no passion shall be gratified at the expence of innocence. Excuses will readily offer themselves, if you are inclined to offend. If Daniel had partaken of the king's bounty, he might have attempted to satisfy his conscience, by pleading his condition as a captive, and the orders of a master, whom it would be death to displease or disobey. He might have adopted the popular maxim, that circumstances alter cases ; and that there are times, when every other duty must yield to that of self-preservation. But Daniel did not wish to impose upon himself ; he was well established in the principles of his religion, and he knew that those principles would be violated by a compliance with the order which had been given relative to him and his companions. His scruples arose from a fact which it may not be improper to mention. Previously to their usual repasts, it was a general practice among the Heathens to make an oblation of some part of the food set before them, as a grateful acknowledgment to the gods, and an intimation, that they

they were fed ~~by~~ their bounty. Every entertainment had, therefore, something in it of the nature of a sacrifice ; and for this reason, Daniel and his religious friends declined to partake of the provisions coming from the king's table ; they viewed them as meats offered to idols, and by consequence unclean, or polluted.

Let the same just views of things, the same regard to duty, the same tenderness of conscience, the same noble resolution to be innocent, whatever self-denial it may cost, actuate all who have just entered life ; or, who have not been so long in the world as to be contaminated by it. How much depends on beginning well, language cannot express. To lose the morning of life, is to lose the most favourable season for sowing the seeds of virtue ; it is to neglect an opportunity for forming good habits, which will never return. If then, in the article now under examination, you approve of the actions, and commend the choice, of Daniel, go, and do likewise. Before they are hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, let your hearts be open to religious impressions ; cherish, by frequent meditation, the fear and love of God ; at all times, let the voice of conscience be heard ; be

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not apprehensive of ~~that~~ which is so formidable to young persons, the charge of superstition ; for the most abject superstition is preferable to licentiousness. Finally, learn from the example before you to decline the most flattering offers, and to forego the most alluring gratifications, if they carry with them only the appearance of evil. Thus watchful over your own hearts, thus resolute in your opposition to temptation of every kind, you will grow in wisdom as you grow in years ; and you will take the most effectual measures to secure the divine friendship and protection.

Secondly.—We may observe in the character of Daniel an habitual reverence of God, and a devout acknowledgment of his agency in all events. When called to interpret a dream which disturbed the monarch, he first repaired to him who is the revealer of secrets, and having received a divine communication, he proceeds in the following strain : “ Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever ; for wisdom and might are his. And he changeth the times, and the seasons ; he removeth kings, and setteth up kings ; he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know, understanding ;

standing ; he revealeth the deep and secret things ; he knoweth what is in darkness, and the light dwelleth with him." It is of the last importance to us to form just ideas of the Supreme Agent, and to remember the government exercised by him over this world. His over-ruling providence is one of the essential doctrines of religion. Referring all events to his wise and benevolent agency, and more especially, considering the revolution of states and empires as his work, we shall feel a confidence in times of difficulty, which no other view of things can possibly inspire. Deeply impressed with his universal presence and righteous government, "light will arise to us in darkness ; nor shall we be afraid of evil tidings, our hearts will be fixed, trusting in the Lord."

Unconnected with God, the aspect of things is often gloomy and discouraging ; but no sooner do we call to mind his divine perfections, and particular providence, than the cloud is dispelled ; his administration, in the same degree in which it commands the assent of our understandings, will restore serenity to our souls ; we shall feel a strong persuasion, that all things will terminate well ; that the good of the system will be promoted ;
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and that God will derive honour from every dispensation. Hence the exhortation of the sacred poet : “ The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice.” Hence also the rapturous strains which were heard in heaven : “ Alleluia, the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.” And hence proceeded the pious confidence, so well expressed in the following words :—“ In time of trouble, he shall hide me in his pavilion : in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me ; he shall set me upon a rock.” These are the sentiments inspired by an unfeigned assent to the being and administrations of God, and an habitual reference of all things to the operation of his providence.

For the satisfaction of our own minds, for our tranquillity and comfort, let us then, in imitation of Daniel, set the Lord always before us. The christian religion throws new light on those doctrines to which he bore testimony ; and which were his consolation in times of distress. The Saviour of men condescended to be very explicit on this subject ; he assured his followers, that the benevolent care of God extended to every part of his dominions, and to every class of beings. As well the fall of a sparrow as that of an empire is represented

represented to be his work by our divine instructor. From the example of the prophet, and the counsels of our Saviour, let us, therefore, learn to see God in all things, and to consider every occurrence as the production of laws instituted by him. To see him who is invisible is not more a duty than a privilege.

Thirdly.—As the presence and agency of God were familiar to the mind of Daniel, so he maintained a continual intercourse with him by prayer and supplication ; he possessed a principle of fervent and habitual devotion ; accordingly, he spread his wants before him, acknowledged his mercies, and, with filial confidence, referred himself to the divine care. His application to heaven in the case of that extraordinary dream, which endangered the lives of all the wise men in Babylon, has been already mentioned ; the same devout spirit accompanied him through life ; and under the reign of Darius, it was the only charge which his idolatrous enemies could bring against him.

When the temple was consecrated, Solomon intreated, that if captives in a distant land, the people should pray to God towards the city which he had chosen, that he would hear in heaven, his

dwelling-place, and maintain their cause. Presuming on a gracious audience, Daniel, three times in the day, entered his chamber, opened the windows towards Jerusalem, and, prostrating himself, fervently prayed, and gave thanks before God.

As in other instances, so in this, his example is worthy of our imitation. We are not, indeed, in a state of exile ; but we are in a state of trial and temptation ; in a state which furnishes many occasions for invoking the God of heaven, and imploring his mercy ; we are subject to wants which he only can supply ; we experience blessings of which he is the Author ; we have friends whom affection teaches us to remember ; and we have a country, for the freedom, prosperity, and happiness of which, we cannot be too importunate with the Governour of the universe. In these circumstances, to restrain prayer must then be regarded as an indication of insensibility and ingratitude.

The ancient worthies were as devout, as they were benevolent and just. They who made the most splendid figure among the Jews were possessed of the purest sentiments of piety, and were attentive to all its offices, both public and private. The apostles of our blessed Saviour prayed
without

without ceasing ; and as to their illustrious Master, his prayers were so frequent, and his supplications so fervent, that, whilst on earth, he might be said to dwell with God, and God with him.

From our relation to the Supreme Being, from the excellencies of his nature, and the dependence of our state, it is easy to infer the propriety of this act of homage. Ought not infinite wisdom, power, and goodness to command our admiration ? And, if we have a parent, able and willing to help us, ought we not to go to that parent, and to ask of him those things which are best for us ? Founded in reason, and the fitness of things, let us, therefore, spread our wants before God ; and let our devotions be animated by this assurance, that the fervent prayer of the righteous man availeth much. Learning this important lesson from the example of Daniel, we may humbly hope to be pronounced, as he was, greatly beloved by that being, to whom all prayers should be addressed ; and before whom all flesh should come.

Fourthly.—The humility of this illustrious prophet, and the consummate modesty with which he declined all commendations for his superiour wisdom, deserve
 our

our consideration. Daniel might have derived lasting fame from his successful interpretation of dreams ; but, so far from taking the glory to himself, he assured the monarch, “ this secret is not revealed to me for any wisdom that I have, more than any living, but for their sakes that shall make known the interpretation to the king, and that thou mightest know the thoughts of thy heart.” There is not any question which we propose with more reluctance, than those of the apostle, “ who made thee to differ ? What hast thou that thou didst not receive ?” There is not any attainment which we make with more difficulty, than that of “ not thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought, but thinking soberly.” But the person, whose character has been under examination, had gained this triumph over the vanity so natural to man ; whatever he possessed, which others wanted, he devoutly referred to him who gives or withholds according to his own pleasure.

Let the same mind, the same spirit be in us, which rendered Daniel greatly beloved. If we possess more knowledge, have stronger powers of mind, or exhibit virtues which are not found in others ;

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if we rise, as christians, above the common standard, let us ascribe the glory to God ; be not high-minded, but fear, is the exhortation of the gospel ; and if it is by the grace of God that we are what we are ; if our powers as men, and our accomplishments as christians are his work, there can be no ground for pride, but every motive to humility.

Finally.—The person so greatly beloved of God was superiour to the fear of man ; and had firmness to encounter every danger, which obstructed the path of duty. When, under the influence of his jealous enemies, the monarch interdicted his devotions, Daniel still continued to pray to God, as he had done aforetime ; the authority of man had no force, when it interfered with the authority of God. Disregarding the royal decree, he, therefore, incurred the penalty ; which was, to be cast into the den of lions : but, for reasons worthy of the divine interposition, a miracle was wrought ; and the malice, which persecuted the prophet, was defeated.

Together with the other virtues which ennoble the example before us, let us copy the firmness and independence of Daniel. There may be times, in which either our
duty

duty or our safety must be neglected. To offend God or man is an alternative to which we may find ourselves unavoidably reduced. In these circumstances, we must imitate the prophet ; we must discharge our duty, and leave the consequences. Fear not those who kill the body, is the direction of our Saviour ; as he taught, so he practised ; the authority of God superseded all other objects ; and every danger was overlooked, whilst he was prosecuting the work assigned him by his heavenly Father. Let these examples encourage us to seek the favour of God, and to secure the approbation of our own consciences, in preference to every other concern ; he who walks uprightly, walks surely. Temporary evils may arise from a steady adherence to duty ; but, in the end, it must be well with those who fear God, and work righteousness. Their present sufferings will be compensated with immortal joys, and their temporal losses with an everlasting inheritance.

Thus have I taken a cursory view of a truly great and eminently good character, preserved in the sacred volume, and transmitted to after ages for their instruction and imitation. I might have expatiated more

more largely on the several virtues exhibited by Daniel ; but, as his character is open to universal inspection, let all who wish to learn their duty from it, make it the object of their contemplation. A recapitulation of the moral instruction already suggested, will conclude the discourse.

Lay an early restraint on those passions which are the tempters of youth ; and by all means preserve that tenderness of conscience which is a security against the appearance of evil. Reflect on God as the Governour of the world ; and in all events, whether merciful or afflictive, whether comparatively great or small, do homage to his divine agency. Be anxious for nothing, but in every thing, by prayer and supplication, let your requests be made known to him. Aim at a principle of habitual devotion ; be clothed with humility ; for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Let the fear of God reign in your hearts ; and be neither flattered nor terrified into any act of disobedience. To these virtues, unite those prescribed by the gospel. In a word, whatsoever things are just and true, whatsoever things are enjoined by the Saviour, and enforced by his example,

example, think on these things. So will you secure the favour and love of God, the peace of your own minds, fortitude in the hour of death, and the prospect of a blessed immortality. That this may be our portions, God of his infinite mercy grant through Christ. *Amen.*

Sermon XIII.

MEANS BY WHICH THE YOUNG MAY
AVOID CONTEMPT.

I TIMOTHY, IV. 12.

LET NO MAN DESPISE THY YOUTH.

THAT christianity might command the respect of mankind, it was highly necessary, that its first preachers should behave in character; in vain would they publish the doctrines, and recommend the duties of religion, unless they lived conformably to their own sacred lessons. Sensible of this, our blessed Saviour commanded his apostles to verify their preaching by their practice; and the apostles likewise exhorted those, whom they introduced to the gospel ministry, to be patterns of those good works, which they recommended to their own charge.

An instance of this, we have in the words before us. Timothy was a young person, whom St. Paul had instructed in the christian system, and whom he had sent forth to enlighten others. Having directed him to command certain things, and to teach certain duties, St. Paul adds : “ *Let no man despise thy youth*, but be thou an example of the believers in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.” This is an excellent lesson ; and we have reason to believe, that the young evangelist governed himself by it. In all probability, he so behaved, as to preserve his own character from contempt ; and to give splendour to the cause in which he had engaged. This is certain, he had the confidence and affection of the great apostle ; and St. Paul had too much discernment to make an unworthy person the object of his friendship.

But my design, in this discourse, is not to draw the character of Timothy, or to show that no one could despise his youth ; the words which I have chosen will admit of a more general application ; they may be considered as an admonition to all who have just begun life, and whose habits are yet unformed. To such persons, con-

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tempt is a very formidable evil ; the sensibility of youth renders this an object of particular aversion ; and indeed at every period of life, persons can better endure to be hated, than despised.

That contempt is not an unavoidable evil, is taken for granted in the words before us. " Let no man despise thy youth," would, upon any other supposition, be unmeaning and impertinent. But it was in the power of Timothy to give no just occasion of contempt ; and it is in the power of all young persons to conduct with so much propriety, as not only to escape contempt, but to command the respect of mankind. There are instances of such a superiority to the temptations of youth ; and the observation is founded in fact, that true " wisdom is grey hairs ; an unspotted life old age." That such instances may be multiplied, I shall now endeavour to enforce the admonition prefixed to this discourse.

And, as an effectual remedy against contempt, let me recommend to the young an habitual reverence of the great God ; a conscientious discharge of the several duties of religion ; continual watchfulness against those tumultuous passions, which war against the soul ; and

an unreserved consecration of all the powers and faculties to the service of God, and practice of piety. Possessed of these principles, and adorned with these virtues, no man can despise you ; there can be no ground for contempt. As an object must be lovely in itself, before it can command and retain our affections, so it must be really contemptible before it can be despised ; but will any one presume to say, that piety and virtue furnish any thing of this description ? To be satisfied on this head, let us give the subject a particular examination.

First.—That no man may have reason to despise you, be persuaded to cultivate an habitual reverence of the great God. This is the direction of the wise man ; “Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth ; whilst the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.” The meaning of Solomon is, that you should remember him with reverence and godly fear, with gratitude and love ; remember him as a father, benefactor, and friend ; and could you habituate yourselves to view him in this light, you would not need a more powerful motive to keep his commandments.

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For want of these high and honourable conceptions of their Supreme Parent, for want of a reverential awe of his character, young persons are often betrayed into levity and profaneness. All idle invocations of his name, all wanton appeals to his omniscience, and all indecent liberties with sacred things, may be traced up to this source. Of all human vices there are none, for which it is not easier to invent an excuse than for those which I have now mentioned. To common profaneness, there seems to be no temptation; it displays neither wit nor sentiment; the weakest and most vulgar of mankind can be as impious with their tongues, as persons of the first abilities: Hence I know of no habit which stamps a character with more infamy, or invites more contempt, than common profaneness. To be guilty in this respect, is to merit the peculiar mortification mentioned in the text.

That no man may despise those, to whom this discourse is more immediately addressed, let me earnestly recommend the fear and love of God. These divine affections will suffer no impious thoughts to possess your minds, no evil word to pollute your lips; your conversation will

be as becometh the gospel ; advancing in years, you will advance in piety, in the knowledge and favour of God ; and your characters will shine with an increasing brightness in the eyes of the world.

Secondly.—That no man may have just occasion to despise you, be careful to lay a restraint upon those lusts and passions to which others indulge ; and present your bodies an unpolluted sacrifice to God, which is your reasonable service. Little will it avail to remember your Creator, unless you avoid those sensual excesses, which he has branded with infamy, and pronounced the objects of his utter abhorrence. Why were you endued with rational and moral powers ? Why were you placed in a rank above the beasts which perish ? Was it that you might sink yourselves below them, by depraving every noble faculty of the mind ? that you might outdo them in sensual indulgences ? that you might, in other words, destroy the nature which God has given you ? The powers and faculties bestowed on the human kind are a proof, that “ rioting, intemperance, and every species of sensuality,” are a disgrace to reason ; and that they ought not to be named among those to whom the inspiration of the Almighty

Almighty hath given understanding. Let it, therefore, be your concern to flee youthful lusts ; and remember, that to yield yourselves up to those lusts, is both to invite and to deserve contempt.

Thirdly.—To comply with the admonition of the apostle, whilst you avoid the grosser pollutions, you should earnestly endeavour to be examples of every christian virtue ; the fear of God should rule in your hearts ; and you should have respect to all his commandments. Whether you consult your reputation, your interest, or your happiness, you will observe this direction. This was the advice of David to the young prince who succeeded to his throne : “ Know thou the God of thy fathers ; and serve him with a perfect heart, and a willing mind.” A sincere reverence of the Deity must incline a youth to obey his laws ; for how can the perfections of God command respect, when his authority is openly insulted ?

Convinced of the indispensable necessity of obedience, let it be your pious concern to walk before God in righteousness and true holiness ; make it the study of your lives to behave like reasonable beings ; resolve that, however disregarded by others, you will adorn the doctrine of
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of your blessed Saviour, by a temper resembling his, and a course of action conformable to his precepts and example. "Think on your ways, and turn your feet into the testimonies of God; make haste and delay not to keep his commandments." The gospel affords you the most excellent rules of duty; its Author, an example of every thing good; instructed by the one, and allured by the other, do you, therefore, yield yourselves up to the service of your Maker; let it be your high ambition to please him; adopt the language and resolution of the psalmist, "I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments. Depart from me, ye evil-doers, for I will keep the commandments of my God."

Thus have I endeavoured to show, in a few words, how a youthful character may be rescued from contempt. It is impossible to despise that person, who retains the purity of his mind, and whose actions are lovely and of good report. Virtue must command respect even from its enemies. Is it conceivable, that a general acquaintance with the character of God, and a principle of true devotion, a reverence of Christ, and an ambition to follow his example,—is it conceivable, that
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a life of sobriety, honesty, and goodness can inspire any other sentiments than those of admiration and respect? If we doubt this, let us try to despise the subject of these virtues; let us try to despise a well-informed understanding, and a good heart; let us endeavour to regard with an eye of contempt, the person who has so much sensibility as to feel his obligations to God, and so much gratitude as to acknowledge them; who is too just to defraud, has too much honour to deceive, and is too good to do an injury of any kind, or to any object in nature. Let us make the experiment, whether filial piety, strict honesty, universal benevolence, submission to the divine Instructor of mankind, and the imitation of his sublime excellencies, can be viewed in a contemptuous light. To sum up all, in one word, let us draw the character of a true christian, and then see whether we can despise the original. It is certain, that the sentiments, inspired by such an object, must be the opposite to that of contempt.

But there are other considerations, which recommend an early acquaintance with God and religion. The pleasure, which it must afford to those, who are most interested in their reputation and happiness,

happiness, ought to have great weight with young persons. Writing to an early christian, St. John says, "I have no greater joy than to see my children walking in the truth." And I would put the question to every parent in this assembly, whether he could not with sincerity, adopt this declaration? In persons of very exceptionable characters, I have observed the utmost solicitude, that their offspring should be wise and good; and though their own lives have been a lesson of vice, yet they have sincerely wished, that their children might escape the contagion of their bad example. This is a testimony of respect which the religion of Christ extorts from its very enemies. They who have not sufficient resolution to forsake their sins, and to follow the rules of christianity, are still so just to its merits, as to acknowledge that it forms the best of characters. To repay the debt of filial gratitude, and to give pleasure to those who stand in the high relation of parents, ought, therefore, to enforce the duty, which I am now recommending.

But another argument, in favour of early religion, is the exquisite pleasure attending it. That godliness has the promise of the life which now is, cannot be

be disputed ; this testimony, so much to the credit of religion, is true in theory, and true in fact. Arguing from its spirit and tendency, we should conclude that virtue and happiness are closely connected ; and reasoning from observation, we shall be confirmed in the sentiment. So far as my own extends, I must say, that I meet with no such examples of cheerfulness, serenity, and true enjoyment, as among those who, in early life, have chosen the good part, which cannot be taken from them. By those, who are unacquainted with it, religion is sometimes drawn in very dark and gloomy colours ; but they who have imbibed its spirit, and have uniformly obeyed its laws, “ know that its ways are ways of pleasantness, and its paths peace.”

To proceed.—Religion, in early life, has this further advantage, that it naturally leads to the highest moral attainments. “ The path of the just man shines more and more.” He, that early devotes himself to the service of God and the duties of religion, will make great progress. It was said of an ancient prophet, that “ he feared God greatly, because he feared him from his youth ;” the same effect may reasonably be expected from the same cause.

cause. Accustomed to the duties of christianity, in the morning of life, they will daily become more delightful ; every year will add to the stores of wisdom and virtue ; and the dawn of piety will at length increase to the perfect day.

Further.—By commencing an early acquaintance with his duty as a christian, a youth will lay a sure foundation for immortal happiness in the world to come ; the habits, formed in this state, must be the measure of our future enjoyments ; those habits constitute our meetness for the inheritance of the saints, or in other words, our qualification for the joys of heaven. If, therefore, by beginning early we make greater progress, and if our progress in religion must determine our final reward, we cannot overlook so powerful an argument in favour of our duty.

Finally.—It is a serious truth, that unless our minds be early formed to the knowledge and practice of religion, there is too much reason to fear, we shall leave the world without these attainments. As the judgment ripens, and the fire of youth moderates, we might hope that religion would find its way to the human heart ; but facts do not encourage this expectation ; we find, that the cares of the world,
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the love of riches, and the pursuits of honour and power, generally succeed the vanities of childhood and youth ; and these passions are as unfriendly to piety and virtue, as the levities of an earlier period. Let us make the appeal to our own hearts : do we find them less inclined to delay the all-important concerns of futurity, than when we first appeared in the world. To the man, who had lost the morning of life, I would propose this solemn question ; whether he has reason to think himself nearer the kingdom of heaven, than at any period to which his memory can carry him ? Before we are aware, our habits are fixed ; and after they are completely formed, he that is filthy will be filthy still. After a certain period, a moral change is only possible ; and to risk our future happiness on a bare possibility, is folly and madness.

May those, for whom this discourse is more particularly designed, be excited by the motives set before them, to pay an early attention to their everlasting interests. Begin life in such a manner as you would wish to prosecute it ; be persuaded, that no state is so favourable to religious impressions, as that in which you now are ; determine that you will furnish
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others with no just occasion to despise your youth. Keep in view the bright example of Christ ; and, like him, as you grow in years, you will grow in favour with God and man. Many other arguments I might set before you, and many other exhortations I might use, did my strength permit ; but your own reflections, when you retire from this place, must supply the defect. In the mean time, I commend you to God and the word of his grace, “ which is able to build you up, and give you an inheritance among them who are sanctified.” *Amen.*

Sermon XIV.

ADVANTAGES OF GOOD, AND DISADVANTAGES OF EVIL COMPANY.

PROVERBS xiii. 20.

HE THAT WALKETH WITH WISE MEN SHALL BE WISE : BUT A COMPANION OF FOOLS SHALL BE DESTROYED.

THIS observation of the inspired moralist is particularly interesting to those, whose habits are unformed, and who are just entering on the cares and duties of life. By an early, and intimate connexion with the wise and good, they will not only do themselves honour, but secure the most substantial advantages. The natural tendency of such a connexion must be highly beneficial, whether considered in a worldly or religious view. It is most certain, that the improvement of the understanding, the cultivation of
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the heart, and that polish, which the manners are capable of receiving, will be greatly promoted by a judicious choice of companions ; and so far as success in business depends upon the good opinion of society, we shall find our interest in the same choice.

On the other hand, an early association with the unprincipled part of mankind will be productive of the worst consequences. The intimate companion of fools will be a partaker of their infamy ; the contagion of their example will contaminate him ; habituated to their vices, he will soon learn to practise them ; and when a partner in their guilt, he can have no other prospect but to be involved in their ruin. These remarks are so just in theory, and confirmed by so many indisputable facts, that no man will pretend to call them in question.

In the words which introduce the discourse, the advantages of good, and the disadvantages of bad company, are briefly, but very judiciously stated. “ *He that walketh with wise men shall be wise : but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.*” Solomon, no doubt, had a particular reference to young persons, when he uttered this remark ; many of his observations are
plainly

plainly designed for their instruction ; and when we reflect, that their habits and manners are yet to be formed, that their reputation is to be acquired, and their fortune to be made, we cannot but consider them as particularly interested in the text.

Relying, therefore, on the serious attention of the young, I shall endeavour, in the *First* place, to state the advantages, which they may derive from an intimate connexion with the wise and good. “ *He that walketh with wise men shall be wise.*” By wise men, as the terms are used in the holy scriptures, we are always to understand men of information and religion ; this honourable distinction is never bestowed but on persons of this character. However eminent as a politician, as a poet, or a natural philosopher, no man, in the sacred writings, is denominated wise, unless he has a general acquaintance with his duty, and a general disposition to practise it. Divine revelation knows no greatness disconnected with virtue.

To return then ; “ *he that walketh with wise men shall be wise.*” That is, the youth, who is so happy as to connect himself with persons of knowledge and principle, will be in the way of deriving
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great improvement from such a connexion. The conversation, which he will generally hear, will be of the most entertaining and instructive kind; and the example set before him, will be a continual comment upon the charms of virtue, and a persuasive to its practice. In such company he will hear no filthy stories, no profane jests, no indecent reflections on God and religion, no malicious falsehoods, no flandering, no vulgar or trifling conversation; the subject of discourse will be always innocent, and never unprofitable.

Connected with wise men, a youth, then, will be continually in the school of wisdom. If attentive, he may greatly enlarge his store of useful knowledge. The observations, which he may hear in the course of conversation, and the discussion of different subjects, which may occasionally take place, must have a tendency to strengthen his mind, and increase his acquaintance with men and things. It is impossible to frequent such society, and not learn many truths, which will be entertaining, at the time, and useful through life.

But as his understanding may be improved, so good habits may be formed,
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by an intercourse with the wife. The force of example is sensibly felt ; no encomium on truth, no recommendation of justice and mercy, no persuasive to piety, no lessons on moderation, chastity, and humility, no exhortation to moral goodness in general, no argument in its favour, can be so efficacious as the display of these several virtues in real life. We are formed for imitation ; consequently, when we connect ourselves with wise and good men, there is a probability that we shall become like them.

From an association with persons of information and morality, our hearts then may derive no less improvement than our understandings. From our companions we may learn truth and justice, meekness and compassion, piety and benevolence, industry and moderation ; in short, every public, private, and christian virtue. Seeing religion honoured by those, whom we honour, we shall be excited to go and do likewise. Seeing its laws obeyed, and its institutions observed, by those whom we love, we shall be probably drawn into the same course of behaviour. A life of honour and virtue will have all our prejudices in its favour, being recommended both by its own native charms,

charms, and the example of those, with whom we are in habits of intimacy and friendship.

But further ; an early connexion with persons of good character will procure the esteem and confidence of the world. The youth, who has formed such connexions, will not only command respect, but will derive many advantages from a prevailing partiality in his favour. He will obtain an easy credit from those who know his manner of life, and the company which he keeps. The confidence, reposed in him, will recommend him in the line of his profession ; and where there is any competition, in regard to employment, the companion of the wise will probably triumph over all his rivals. However civil the world may be to persons of a different description, yet, where their interest is concerned, they carefully distinguish between those who associate with the wise, and such as frequent the society of fools.

Thus have I endeavoured to point out the advantages, which may be expected from a judicious choice of friends. The head, the heart, the reputation, and the outward circumstances, may be essentially benefited by walking with the wise ; such
society

society may prove the school of wisdom, and the school of virtue. By keeping such company, a young person may acquire that species of knowledge, which is always useful in life ; and he will be naturally led to practise those virtues, which form the good neighbour, and the good christian. His reputation moreover will derive splendour from his connexions ; and his worldly interest will be greatly promoted by that confidence which attends a good name. In every view, then, *“ he that walketh with wise men will be wise.”* To study our highest interest is certainly a dictate of wisdom ; and this dictate is revered by those, who choose their friends from the more enlightened and deserving part of society.

But, if it be true, that *“ he who walketh with wise men shall be wise,”*—I proceed to observe, *Secondly*—that it is no less true, that *“ the companion of fools shall be destroyed.”* Bad company is as pernicious, as good company is advantageous. By associating with the unprincipled class of persons, the understanding becomes darkened, the heart depraved, the passions inflamed, the reputation blasted, and every inclination of the soul turned towards those excesses, which must be attended

tended with shame and ruin. It is an observation of an ancient poet, "evil communications corrupt good morals." This observation is quoted, with applause, by an inspired apostle ; and it is supported by so many undeniable facts, that we cannot wonder, St. Paul should introduce it as an established truth.

As, under the former head, I pointed out the particular advantages derived from the society of the wise, it may not be amiss, under this head, to describe the evils arising from bad connexions ; to show the manner of their production, and their consequences : and as good company improves, so bad company must as naturally pervert the understanding. The mind, like the body, is strengthened by exercise ; but where no remarks are made, and no subject discussed, the mind must be enfeebled for want of employment ; and it must be perverted where subjects are treated unfairly and sophistically, and when sent in quest of objections, rather than in pursuit of truth. Here then is one disadvantage, which the companion of fools will derive from their society. He will either learn nothing, or he will learn to cavil and object without any clear ideas of the subject opposed, or
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any disposition to receive information ; so far, therefore, as the understanding is concerned, he, who associates with fools, is a great loser.

But that is not all ; the heart is insensibly corrupted by the conversation and example of such profligate persons. Let us suppose, that, at the time the connexion was formed, a youth retained some good principles ; how very soon would those principles be destroyed by the conversation which he would hear, and the transactions of which he would be a witness. He would be told, that the religion, in which he had been instructed, was as groundless as the heathen mythology ; that politicians fabricated the system for civil purposes, and that priests supported the imposture from motives of a more selfish nature ; that the bible is full of contradictions ; that wise men have long given it up, and that the vulgar would soon follow their example ; he would be told, that conscience could have no real existence in man, there being such an opposition in its supposed dictates ; he would be assured that a future state could be no object of rational expectation ; and that heaven and hell were the most monstrous of all absurdities : in short, he would

would be assailed with objections against the providence and being of a God, against the moral freedom of man, against the essential difference of right and wrong, and against every idea of accountableness and retribution. Judge now the consequences of such pretended reasoning on the momentous subject of religion. Must not discourses of so impious a nature tend to deprave the heart, and to prepare the way for all manner of licentiousness?

But this is not all: the companion of fools would probably hear the sacred truths of religion, and its most serious professors, continually bantered. It is well known, that these subjects, and these persons, have always been the butt of fools: how unfavourable, therefore, must be the impression made by such illiberal arts on the young mind? A youth, however he might once reverence the doctrines or professors of religion, would soon be bantered out of all respect both for the one and the other; he would first learn to be indifferent to that, which he once respected; he would next learn to despise, and finally to scoff at, every serious truth, or appearance of devotion.

But his danger would not wholly arise from this quarter; besides direct attacks
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on religion and its professors, he would hear a strain of conversation, which would insensibly undermine every good principle. Unmeaning oaths and imprecations, impure witticisms, idle falsehoods, and filthy stories, must eventually pollute the mind, and destroy, as well a sense of decency, as of religion. The injurious tendency of such discourse is verified by a multitude of examples.

But further.—The example of fools must be still more seducing than their conversation; their companion, therefore, will be naturally drawn into all their vices. In imitation of them, he will deride the moral restraints, which he once felt; and will rise superiour to that sense of shame, which controls others. Habituated to the society of fools, he will, in time, become as profane as they are, as immodest, as intemperate, as debauched, as idle, as extravagant, as dishonest, and, in all respects, as corrupt. The contagion of vice is easily spread; in its progress it is most rapid; and it becomes an incurable disorder, unless proper remedies be applied in its first stages.

Allowing then an intimacy with the profligate part of mankind is productive of these ill effects, how just is the observa-

tion in the text ? “ *The companion of fools shall be destroyed.*” Yes, if their society be the means of his perversion, he must be considered as ruined in every respect. His understanding has received a great injury, and his heart a still greater ; he is ruined, as to his intellectual and moral improvements ; he is ruined as a useful member in society ; and, as a christian, absolutely undone. His reputation is ruined, and, with his good name, very probably, his health of body, and his worldly interest. But the mischief does not terminate here ; it is very possible, that a foundation may be laid for shame and misery beyond the grave. A future state of retribution is an indisputable truth, upon the principles of the gospel ; and it is perfectly reasonable to suppose that bad habits, early contracted, and cherished to the last, should subject us to future ruin. Tribulation and anguish must grow out of such a disordered state of the soul.

From this view of things, how cautious ought we to be in the choice of our early companions ? And of what moment is it, that we associate with those, whose acquaintance will be an honour to us, and from whose manners, conversation, and
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general behaviour, we may learn wisdom and virtue? You cannot be insensible, that every advantage is on the side of virtuous connexions. Do you wish to increase your stock of useful information? then walk with the wise. Do you wish to increase your reverence for the Supreme Being, your acquaintance with his laws, your faith in his beloved Son, your subjection to his gospel; do you wish to improve your temper, and to give a real polish to your manners; in a word, have you the laudable ambition to become christians? Then let such as deserve this character, form the circle in which you move. By an habitual intercourse with such persons, your interest, in the largest sense of the word, will be consulted. If you value your innocence, it will be safe in such society. If you prize the good opinion of the world, and wish for its kind offices, by walking with the wise you will take an effectual measure to secure the one, and to conciliate the other.

“Blessed is the man, who walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.” That you may obtain this blessing, “look round with an attentive eye; and weigh characters well,
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before you connect yourselves too closely with any who court your society." So far as the duties of life will permit, avoid all familiar intercourse with those, who make a mock at sin ; view such persons as the most insidious and dangerous companions ; realize that their friendship can do you no honour, or redound in any respect to your advantage ; so far from it, endeavour to possess yourselves with this idea,—that you hazard every thing by associating with such characters. May the observation of the wise man make a lasting impression on your minds ; and persuaded by it to walk with the wise, may you find, by happy experience, that the ways of wisdom, are ways of pleasantness ; and all its paths peace. *Amen.*

Sermon XV.

THE CORRUPTING INFLUENCE OF EVIL DISCOURSE.

I CORINTHIANS, xv. 33.

EVIL COMMUNICATIONS CORRUPT GOOD
MANNERS.

THE Author of our being hath formed us for society and friendship ; by implanting within us the social principles, we feel ourselves powerfully drawn towards each other, and from this source derive some of our highest enjoyments. A mutual intercourse has the most happy tendency to soften our cares, and to improve our pleasures ; and we justly despise the man, who can retire from society, and think it a privilege to be alone.

However, if a commerce with the world may be esteemed a source of happiness, it is sometimes very fatal to the

morals of an individual. It has destroyed those virtuous principles, by which he once ordered his conversation ; corrupted his understanding, and depraved his heart. The best system of practical piety has been overturned by the infidel lessons of wicked men ; for, in society, there are persons, who, not content with their own ungodliness, take a cruel delight in seducing others ; and too often has unsuspecting innocence been utterly ruined by the sophistry of their pernicious maxims, and the contagion of their ill example.

Such infamous characters the apostle undoubtedly had in view, when he quoted the words with which I introduce my discourse. They were uttered by *Menander*, a comic poet of *Athenis* ; and, agreeably to the measure of the Greek original, might be thus rendered—

“ *Good morals are debauched by talk profane.*”

—Saint Paul here applies this adage to those Epicurean sensualists who denied a future state, and expected all their happiness on this side the grave. He observes, it was the language of such,—“ Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.” To which he replies,—“ Be not deceived ; *evil communications* (or rather profane discourses, *ὀμιλία κακὰ*) corrupt good manners.”

manners." As if he had said :—Brethren, be ever on your guard against those pernicious characters, who would persuade you the present will be the whole of your existence ; there are persons who give up those sublime sentiments and pursuits which animate the christian ; they will tell you, they belong not to such creatures as we are ; that we have only to eat and drink, that is, to enjoy life as it passes, because in a little time we shall be no more. From such profane and impious lessons do you turn away, and have as little connexion as possible with persons who adopt sentiments so opposed to the gospel ; for, however unshaken your faith, and irreproachable your morals may be at present, it is more than possible they may both suffer by an intercourse with such characters.

This advice of the holy apostle we may all take to ourselves ; and more especially should persons in younger life endeavour to profit by it. They are least aware of the subtil arts of wicked men ; they are least apprehensive of the contagion of ill example ; their bosoms are soft and impressible ; and a wrong bias, at that early period, may prove too hard for the wisest lessons of piety, and the superiour knowledge

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edge of riper years. For which reason, they should esteem themselves peculiarly interested in a discourse which assumes this for its motto—*Evil communications corrupt good manners.*

To illustrate the very important truth contained in these words, I shall—*First*—inquire what those communications are, which deserve the appellation of evil and profane.

And—*Secondly*—shew how they poison and corrupt the morals of society.

First.—I am to inquire into the nature of those communications or discourses, which the apostle esteemed so profane, and of such a pernicious tendency ; and I need not tell those, who are acquainted with the more debauched part of mankind, that there are no maxims so impious, no sentiments so blasphemous and absurd, but have some advocates among persons of that description. In the assembly of the mockers, you will hear not only the obligations of piety, but even the perfections of God, and his existence, called in question. Though the things that are made declare the eternal power and godhead, yet you will hear them presumptuously denied ; and the whole system of religion represented as the work
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of cunning priests and artful politicians. The most profane and impious of all discourses are those which strike at the being of a God ; his existence and perfections are the foundation of all religion ; deny these, and the religion of nature as well as revelation will be a perfect farce. If there is no God, piety is an empty name ; morality the work of imagination ; man a self-moving machine ; and the universe an accidental jumble of atoms : yet, notwithstanding all these absurdities with which atheism is attended, some men are hardy enough to profess themselves atheists. Either because they wish there was no God, or from a fond affectation of appearing singular, they vent opinions so blasphemous, so contradictory, so profane !

Lessons of atheism are certainly one species of those *evil communications which corrupt good manners*. The subtilities employed to support that shocking system are very captivating to persons who have a bias towards infidelity : their novelty recommends them ; and the deceitfulness of the human heart too often gives them the force and authority of argument. Hence many have been led away in the snare of the wicked ; and from secretly wishing there was no God, have brought themselves

selves to believe it. The heart has a very considerable influence over the head, for which reason, it is very natural to suppose, the one should be blind to truth, when the other is totally corrupt and depraved.

Again ;—those discourses are justly stigmatized as evil and profane, which attack the over-ruling providence of God, and the notice he takes of human actions. It is of little importance to acknowledge the existence of a Deity, if we deny his moral government ; it is owning him in words, but disowning him in reality. A God, who, retired to some distant part of the universe, attends only to his own enjoyments ; who, if he beholds them at all, is an indifferent spectator of human actions ; such a God can be neither an object of terroure nor veneration. As to any moral purposes, we might as well commence *atheists* in form, as to admit the existence of such a being.

All, therefore, who represent the great Jehovah as such a negative character, may be considered as perverters of the truth, and enemies to all religion. The discourses of such persons, if universally believed, would be fatal to good manners ; they strip the Deity of his distinguishing glory ; and they eradicate all principles of piety,
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and filial veneration from the human heart. Against such we ought to be ever on our guard, as we value a rational faith, an approving conscience, or our expectations as christians.

A good mind is shocked and confounded, when it considers the profane liberties which have been taken with the great God. One would imagine, the things that are made, the visible creation, would always have secured him from the insults of atheism, and impressed every heart with his divine existence ; and as reasonable were it to suppose, the course of events, and their obvious tendency, would have precluded all doubts of his over-ruling providence. But such is the perverseness of wicked men, they will ever raise objections against those truths which either threaten or reproach their immoralities ; they will shut their eyes upon the meridian sun ; and however clear and inviting, they will not come to the light, lest their deeds be reproved ; hence the pernicious sophistry, which has affronted the common sense of mankind, and been so fatal to those who have fondly listened to it.

Thirdly.—We may consider those as avowed enemies to good morals, who
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would confound all human actions, and represent them equally acceptable in the sight of God ; and those discourses we may stigmatize as peculiarly impious and profane, which, in a fair and impartial view, have this for their object. That principle of discernment, which we all possess, discovers an essential difference between right and wrong, moral good and evil. We are as certain that justice and injustice, piety and profaneness, humility and pride, are not mere empty names, as we are of our own existence ; no self-evident truth is more obvious to the understanding, than the eternal difference of these moral qualities ; however, attempts have been made to confound them, and to betray the simple into this pernicious error, that all actions are viewed alike by a wise God.

It is the practical language of many, that the difference of moral good and evil hath not any foundation in nature. The prophet speaks of some, who “ put light for darkness, and darkness for light, sweet for bitter, and bitter for sweet ;” and indeed the practice of every wicked man speaks the same falsehood. However, it is one thing to confound human actions in practice, and another in theory ; he
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that does the latter, shews himself obstinately bent to affront the common sense of mankind ; and destroy every virtuous effort of society.

Finally.—They are very bad companions, and their communications eminently profane, who employ their wit against the christian revelation, and endeavour to persuade the world, they have been deluded by a cunningly devised fable. Christianity is attended with sufficient evidence to recommend it to any serious mind ; the arguments in favour of it have been examined with the utmost care and attention ; and notwithstanding the objections of infidelity, the greatest minds have submitted to the faith and profession of the gospel. It is, however, still opposed in the world ; its doctrines are derided, its precepts undervalued, and its sanctions treated with scorn and contempt ; little wits still affect to stand out against its convincing evidence, and not content with their own scepticism, would draw all others into unbelief. To persons acquainted with mankind, the scene I have opened is nothing new ; they are sensible, what arts are employed to undermine revelation, and too well they know, how fatally they have succeeded.

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Thus have I hinted at some of those communications, which St. Paul would have stigmatized as evil and profane, had he lived at this day. I now proceed, in the *Second* place, to shew how they poison the morals of society. *Evil discourses*, says the apostle, *corrupt good manners*. Any person, who is in the least acquainted with the natural tendency of things, will easily believe, that such errors in speculation, as I have just pointed out, will have a most pernicious influence over the practice. Was the being of a God universally given up, what monsters of wickedness would many of the human species become? Could his over-ruling providence, and the notice he takes of the moral conduct of his creatures, be absolutely disproved, what might not we expect from many of the children of darkness? Beings, who are now kept within some bounds, whose violence is restrained by their fears and apprehensions, would give a loose to their infernal passions, and turn this world into a field of blood. It is certain, a prevailing belief that there is a God, and that he is not an indifferent spectator of human actions, is a very great restraint upon mankind. Though we may not always advert to it in the hour of temptation, yet

yet it is this persuasion, which has grown up with us from our childhood, that preserves us from many enormities we should otherwise commit ; it often keeps us from destroying ourselves, and bringing destruction upon all around us ; it is this, in short, which has rendered this world preferable to the regions of darkness. What then shall we say of him, who endeavours to undermine this great truth, and to destroy that system of religion which is built upon it ? What ideas shall we form of that person, who shall openly deny the divine existence, or pretend the attributes of God are the mere work of human imagination ? Surely we must view him as a pest to society, an enemy to mankind, and a scandal to his species ; and was he banished from among men, as utterly unworthy of any connexion with them, it would not be a punishment greater than his deserts.

That society should subsist, and the important ends of it be answered, it is absolutely necessary, the being of a God, and his moral government, should be generally believed. There are many crimes which no human laws could prevent ; many disorders which could not be rectified by the wisest legislature on earth ; but where
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human authority would be vain, a lively sense of the divine existence, of the perfections and providence of God, has answered the end. The natural fears of mankind have overcome their lusts and passions; and the terrors of the Lord have done that, which no human authority could have effected. From hence it is plain, good morals are essentially injured by those evil communications, which the atheist would offer to the world; a barrier against the most enormous vices is removed; their passions are set at liberty; their lusts are unrestrained; and men of corrupt minds are invited to every guilty excess. Language is faint, when we attempt the description of atheism, or to point out its pernicious effects.

But the communications which, at the present day, are most prejudicial to good manners, are those which strike at the authority of revelation, or exhibit the christian system as an object of ridicule. It is not every bad mind that will have patience to listen to those subtilties, by which the being of a God is disproved, or his providential government overturned; it requires great attention to make any proficiency in the science of atheism; so obvious is the existence of a first cause,
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and so plain the fundamental truths of natural religion, that it is not without much labour and study, either of them is obscured : but to revelation it is not altogether so difficult to raise objections. A sprightly imagination and a wicked heart may take such liberties with the doctrines and precepts of the gospel, as shall greatly diminish that reverence which they once inspired. Objections to christianity do not so far transcend the vulgar understanding ; there is not that subtilty employed to carry a point ; the arts of infidelity, in other words, are more popular than those of atheism, and more readily engage a wicked mind.

That the gospel exhibits the best system of morality that was ever proposed to mankind, is acknowledged even by some of those, who profess to be unconvinced of its divine original. It certainly furnishes a man unto every good work ; it sets before him the best rules of conduct, and enforces them by the noblest example ; it teaches a man how to behave in every station and relation of life ; forms him to the character of a good citizen, neighbour and friend ; and encourages a course of virtue by an eternal reward. A person, who should regulate his behaviour

in life by the precepts of christianity, would be an ornament to human nature ; he would be a general blessing to mankind ; every eye that saw him, would have reason to bless him ; and every tongue to proclaim his praise. Such a person, if a ruler, would govern in righteousness ; if a subject, would demean himself peaceably, and cheerfully submit to all those laws, which were instituted for the public good. If a parent, he would be tender and affectionate ; if a child, pious and obedient. He would be generous as a master ; and faithful as a *slave*. Such is the natural tendency of those doctrines and precepts which compose the christian system ; and so divine their influence over those who believe and obey them !

What then could be more prejudicial, both to society and the individual, than to set this glorious system at naught, and expose it as an object of ridicule ? What more impolitic than to take off those restraints, which the gospel lays upon the rebellious passions of mankind ? What more daring and profane, than to deride that which brings such ample evidence of its heavenly original ? Surely these bold contemners of religion have no knowledge ;

edge ; they must be equally destitute of piety and common sense, thus to weaken the motives to obedience, and encourage an obstinate contempt of all authority, both human and divine.

It cannot be denied, that the morals of mankind are greatly debauched ; notwithstanding the light and discoveries of the gospel, men act in direct opposition to their duty ; though reproached by their consciences, and constantly admonished by the word of God, they follow the devices of their own wicked hearts, and pursue their own guilty pleasures ; whatever injury they may do society, or to whatever hazard they may expose their own souls. This can be no otherwise accounted for, than from the pernicious lessons, and bad examples they meet with in the world ; hearing the great truths of religion frequently derided, and being familiarized to the practice of every enormity, they first endure the horrid visage of impiety, then admire, and then embrace. The progress through the different stages of vice is very rapid, when animated by evil communications, and countenanced by a bad example.

Whether we consider man as an individual, or a member of society, it is of infinite

ite importance to him to secure his morals from the contagion there is in the world ; this is in reality and truth the *one thing needful*. To abound in wealth may be esteemed a blessing ; to be dignified with public honours, a peculiar felicity ; but these things are nothing, they are not worthy to be compared with an approving conscience, and the approbation of God. On the other hand, we may think it a great calamity to lose our substance, our health or reputation ; but to lose our innocence and peace of mind, would certainly be a much greater ; stript of our virtue, we must be poor indeed ; and deprived of the favour of our Maker, we must be wretched beyond description.

I shall, therefore, improve the subject by a serious exhortation to avoid those *evil communications which corrupt good manners*. Says the wise man,—“ Cease, my son, to hear the instructions of those that cause thee to err.” Let us all profit by this admonition ; let us consider it as addressed to ourselves ; and in compliance with it, let us be peculiarly careful in the choice of our company and friends. “ Blessed is the man who walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat

feat of the scornful : he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water ; his leaves shall not wither, his fruits shall not fail."

It is a disgrace to any man of character to consort with those, who sport with the sacred things of religion, and deride a life of piety and virtue ; his feelings must be greatly injured by their profaneness ; his indignation must be often excited by their wanton levity ; and if he has any sense of religion upon his own mind, he must be extremely disgusted at the liberties they may be disposed to take with the gospel which he professes, and that Being whom he adores ; he must, therefore, either abandon such connexions, or his religious impressions must wear off, and he become equally riotous and scornful with his dissolute companions. A man cannot preserve his virtue amid such associates ; it will be a crime in him to hear all the hard speeches which ungodly sinners may utter, and to be a witness of their impiety ; unless he is repelled by their profane discourse, we must be allowed to impeach his zeal and sincerity, and to suppose the honour of God, and the credit of religion, are not the real object of his jealous concern.

Let us then studiously avoid the assembly

sembly of mockers, and shut our ears against those impious communications which corrupt good manners. O my soul, come not thou into their dwelling ; with their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united. Their house is the way to hell, leading down by the chambers of death : enter not, therefore, into their path ; and go not in their way ; avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away ; for the curse of the Lord is in the house of these scorners, and shame shall be the reward of their impious folly.

But let me caution my *young friends*, in an especial manner, against those pernicious discourses, which are so fatal to good morals ; and those infamous characters, which would seduce them from their duty. You may be told, that religion is all a cheat ; that priests and politicians have invented the imposture, in order to keep the vulgar in awe, and enrich themselves. You may be told, that men of sagacity now see through their art, and have thrown off the shackles, which priestcraft and tyranny had forged. You may be further entertained with the gloom and severity of a religious life ; the pleasures you must sacrifice, and mortifications you must undergo, may be all set
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before you ; and, in one word, you may be exhorted to live while you live, to be as happy as your frolick age may dispose you, because to-morrow you may die, and there will no redemption from the grave.

These discourses will easily engage your attention ; and though, at first, they may shock your feelings, it is more than possible, they may deeply impress your heart. There is something so bold and daring in them, and they are recommended by such an air of novelty, that they will readily catch the young mind ; from enduring, you may listen to them with pleasure ; from admiring, you may be led to join in them ; it will soon appear manly and heroic to rise superiour to the principles of education ; vanity will strongly tempt you to turn aside from the common road ; your lusts and passions will side with your wicked seducers, and their pernicious example will complete your overthrow.

Wherefore, consider well the danger of such connexions ; consider the amazing hazard to which you expose your innocence, your reputation, your peace ; consider the infamy you bring upon yourselves, by receding from those virtuous principles, which have been instilled into you
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by your parents, or those who have been intrusted with your education ; consider the shame in which you will involve them, and the injury you may do your own souls. The time will come, when an approving conscience will appear of infinitely more value to you than ten thousand worlds. Soon, very soon, will the season of youth be over ; yet a little, and you must take leave of all present enjoyments, and prepare for the tribunal of God ; and what a tormenting reflection must it be, in your last moments, that you have hated instruction, and despised reproof ! How must it aggravate the pains of death, that you have said, in the thoughtless gaiety of your heart, depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways ! Call for your seducers in those moments, and see what consolation they will afford ; they may tell you, you frighten yourselves with a phantom of your own raising ; and that the prejudices of education are the source of all your terrors. You will reply, miserable comforters are ye all. The wit and banter which once afforded you such amusement, will now lose all its charms ; and you will poorly relish the unseasonable mirth with which they would allay your fears.

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Let these considerations confirm those sentiments of piety, which you may now entertain ; let them deafen you to those evil communications, which are so fatal to morality ; let them guard you against the snares of the wicked, and the seducing arts of corrupt and ungodly minds ; and take this truth with you, bear it ever in mind, write it upon the table of your heart,—“ If thou art wise, thou shalt be wise to thyself ; if thou scornest, thou alone must bear it.”

Sermon XVI.

THE PROGRESSIVE NATURE OF VICE.

JEREMIAH ix. 3.

THEY PROCEED FROM EVIL TO EVIL.

THE progressive nature of virtue and vice is a doctrine inculcated by the word of God, and confirmed by the experience and observation of all, who have studied their own characters, or attended to the actions of others. To be stationary either in religion or in wickedness, is morally impossible; man is so formed, and such are the circumstances in which he is placed, that he will proceed from virtue to virtue, or "from evil to evil." Either he will grow in grace, or increase in wickedness; his path will shine more and more, or the shades will deepen, till his path shall be lost in utter darkness.

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He cannot, whilst under the influence of religious principles, stop at any christian attainments ; nor, when he once departs from the rule of duty, can he predetermine to what distance he will wander ; he may flatter himself that the path of virtue may be easily regained ; but no person ever made the experiment, without discovering his mistake.

To these reflections I have been led by those words of the ancient prophet, which describe the Jewish people. At the time, when Jeremiah appeared as a witness against them, they had filled up the measure of their guilt ; shocked at their crimes, and terrified at the judgments which were ready to overwhelm them, he draws their character, and laments their fate in this pathetic strain : “ Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughters of my people. Oh that I had in the wilderness a lodging place of wayfaring men ; that I might leave my people, and go from them ! for they are all adulterers, an assembly of treacherous men ; and they bend their tongues like a bow for lies ; but they are not valiant for the truth upon the earth ; for *they proceed from*

from evil to evil ; and they know not me, saith the Lord." This was the character of the Jews, not long before their destruction ; the strains of the prophet were, therefore, such as might have been expected from a man of established piety and benevolence.

In the following discourse, I shall not confine myself to the Jewish nation ; but shall endeavour to confirm and account for the fact, stated in the text.

First.—It is a general truth, that men, who have thrown off the restraints of religion, “ proceed from evil to evil ; ” thoughtlessness of God has terminated in an avowed contempt of his character and authority ; from doubts, in regard to religion, they have proceeded to unbelief ; from small offences, they have gone on to the most daring crimes. In the first stages of vice, they could not be unjust, malevolent, or perfidious, without doing some violence to their feelings ; but in the event, they have become strangers to remorse ; occasional falsehoods have been succeeded by a confirmed disregard to the truth ; occasional acts of dishonesty have led to every species of injustice. Intemperate at times, men have been reconciled to the lowest degradation of their nature ;

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one deliberate departure from the laws of chastity, has been followed by all the crimes which mark the libertine ; anger in the beginning, has become revenge in the end ; and a disrespectful manner of conversing on the subject of religion has generated, not only that foolish talking and jesting which are not convenient, but habitual blasphemy and impiety.

The danger of one wrong step, deliberately taken, is not to be described. The man who is only beginning the practice of dishonesty, would be shocked, if his future character were unfolded to him. If he were told, that the time would come, when a regard to his own interest would outweigh all other considerations ; when fraud and deception would lose their deformity in his eyes ; and when he would stoop to the vilest arts in order to increase his substance, he would think himself highly injured by the insinuation. His present intention is to retain a large portion of his integrity ; and he esteems himself incapable of actions to which his present measures are a natural introduction.

The same astonishment would seize the person who is in the first stage of sensuality, if his future excesses were revealed

to him ; the infamous vices of the libertine and drunkard ; the crimes which mark the whoremonger and adulterer ; the degrading passions and habits of those who glory in their shame, are objects of his detestation. In the sincerity of his heart, he would protest against such actions, and would maintain the impossibility of his setting, in this manner, all law and decency at defiance. Still, how easy is the progress from temporary indulgence to confirmed sensuality ! And how many, in the event, have become a disgrace to human nature, because they did not resist the first temptations to sinful pleasure !

The fatal tendency of other passions is also an established fact. The man, who under the influence of ambition has been tempted to commit small crimes, has found himself insensibly reconciled to any practices, however iniquitous, which would accomplish his designs : the man, who has secretly pined at the prosperity of others, has at length felt all the misery, and contracted all the guilt, arising from a confirmed state of envy : the person, who has allowed himself, in some instances, to censure and condemn, has eventually become notorious for evil-speaking ; but, in no one article, is the observation
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in the text more decidedly verified than in the concerns of religion. Men first become indifferent towards it ; they have then their doubts respecting its divine authority ; and, finally, they abandon it as a fable. In regard to its immediate duties, they begin with neglecting them occasionally, and end with neglecting them altogether ; this is particularly true, as to those institutions which are intended to give public countenance to religion, and to maintain its influence in society. To neglect them, at one time, is a strong temptation to repeat the offence : hence it may be observed, that excuses multiply when devotion is growing cold, till at length the mind acquiesces in a general neglect of all the forms and institutions of religion.

Thus applicable are the words of the text as well to those who live under the christian, as to those who were placed under the Jewish dispensation. Human nature is the same ; and moral habits are formed according to the same laws. If a Jew, when he had made a surrender of his religion, would proceed from evil to evil, why should not one, educated a christian, in like circumstances, act the same part ? Why should not he proceed from

from carelessness to indifference, from the neglect of one duty to that of others, from doubts to unbelief, from a secret wish that christianity were not true, to a persuasion that it is false? Why should he not proceed from irreverence to impiety, from falsehoods uttered in sport to falsehoods dictated by malice; from impositions in small things, to still greater wrongs; from low practices to the most dishonest arts; from occasional to confirmed and habitual excesses? When christian principles are abandoned, what is to prevent an accumulation of new guilt, as long as life and the powers of action are continued? The apostle observes, "evil men and seducers wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived." This was true at the age in which St. Paul flourished; and it will remain true, as long as the present laws of human nature continue in force.

Having thus considered the fact advanced in the text, I proceed, in the *Second* place, to account for it; and various reasons may be assigned for the progress of wicked men from evil to evil. First, the longer they are accustomed to do wrong, the less they suffer from the remonstrances of conscience; the begin-
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nings of vice are generally accompanied with great uneasiness. There was a time, when the heart of David smote him only for cutting off the skirt of his master's garment ; and whilst the conscience retains its sensibility, it will be a great interruption to the pleasures of sin. Persons, which have not learned to defy its authority, and to turn a deaf ear to its reproaches, will find that it is an awful monitor, and that its scourges are not to be despised.

Time, however, and familiarity with vice, will conquer this principle ; the moral sense, like all the other senses, may be impaired ; the heart may grow hard through the deceitfulness of sin ; to use a scripture-expression, conscience may be seared as with a hot iron ; in plain language, being often resisted and habitually disregarded, natural conscience may cease to accuse, to judge, or to terrify, whatever course of action may be pursued. Such is the constitution of man ; and such the necessary consequences of rejecting the guide within our own bosoms, and doing that which is right in our own eyes, in defiance of its admonitions.

It follows, then, that men " proceed from evil to evil," because they do not feel

feel the restraints of conscience. When they do wrong, they are not tortured at the time, nor does the recollection of their guilt render them miserable ; they are strangers to self-accusation ; whatever duties they omit, whatever laws they violate, they are not subjected to that anguish of mind, which was the consequence of early transgressions ; they have gained a triumph over conscience, and therefore can proceed from one evil action to a greater, without those forebodings which are an earnest of future punishment.

Delivered from this restraint, what might be expected but a rapid progress from one degree of wickedness to another ? What is to prevent an accumulation of guilt in circumstances so unfavourable to virtue ? No longer possessed of a principle of moral discernment, must not men put evil for good, and darkness for light ? Must they not pursue a course of sin with increased ardour, when the baseness, guilt, and danger of moral evil, no longer disturb them, and they feel neither terror nor remorse ? It is impossible to weigh these questions, and not to perceive one very important reason for the fact mentioned in the text.

Secondly.—Men proceed from evil to
evil,

evil, because they rise superiour to a sense of shame. A regard to appearances, and a respect to public opinion, have a commanding influence over those who have a character to support, and a reputation to preserve ; they are restrained, by a principle of shame, from many actions to which they are strongly inclined, and to which the authority of God would be ineffectually opposed ; but this principle may be overcome, and its influence defeated. When evil affections have been long indulged, and when a course of evil actions have been deliberately pursued, shame will cease to operate, appearances will be disregarded, and the public disapprobation will become an object of indifference. The boldness of habitual transgressors is mentioned in the sacred pages ; the prophet speaks of persons, who are incapable of blushing, even when their worst actions are brought to light.

We have, then, another weighty reason for the increasing immorality of those, who have yielded themselves up servants to unrighteousness. It is easy to believe that persons will proceed from evil to evil, when they are as insensible to shame, as they are incapable of remorse ; wanting these powerful restraints, it is conceivable

able that they should go to the greatest lengths in wickedness : accordingly we find, that a prostration of all principle may be dated from an extinction of shame, and a contempt of the opinions and censures of our fellow-men.

Thirdly.—An increasing passion for criminal indulgences conspires with the facts already stated, to justify the observation in the text. Every lust gains strength by gratification ; the longer men continue under the dominion of sin, the more pleasure do they find in the practice of it. As virtue displays new charms to its sincere followers, so does vice, not merely lose its deformity, but present new attractions to those who are addicted to it ; in other words, the farther men proceed in a course of wickedness, the more agreeable such a course becomes, and the more do their present enjoyments depend upon the indulgence of such passions as have gained an ascendancy over them.

This change in the human inclination is, then, another argument in support of the doctrine advanced by the prophet. The workers of iniquity proceed from evil to evil, because they experience an increasing pleasure in doing that which their passions dictate ; sin becomes more desirable

desirable by familiarity with it, and by habit : hence, it might be rationally expected, that they would add iniquity to transgression, that they would grow more deaf to conscience, more indifferent about reputation, more obedient to their lusts and passions, and more determined to seek their present happiness in sinful gratifications.

Fourthly.—Persons, who have pleasure in unrighteousness, are emboldened, not only to continue in sin, but to contract new guilt, by flattering themselves that there is no truth in religion ; and that its terrors are a human invention. Men first throw off the moral restraints, and then call in question the evidence of revelation. I would not be understood that this is universally the case ; but that there are many instances in which a course of action hostile to the gospel has created suspicions that the gospel is not from heaven, but of men. How natural is it, that persons who are devoted to sin, should feel a strong prejudice against any system which inculcates a life of virtue ? How natural is it, that they should turn from an example, which is a continual reproach to themselves ? How natural that they should disbelieve a future state

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of punishment, when that punishment must be their portion, if the christian revelation be divine? The state of our hearts has a great influence on our judgment; the force of evidence, in all cases, depends essentially on the pre-disposition of our minds to receive or reject. If, therefore, we secretly and earnestly wish that the gospel may be discovered to be nothing more than a cunningly devised fable, the probability is, that we shall eventually embrace this opinion. Its internal evidence will make no impression; its external evidence will not persuade; nor shall we perceive any force in the various arguments to which christianity appeals.

An evil heart of unbelief being the natural consequence of vile affections and vicious habits, how reasonable is it to suppose that persons, determined on the indulgence of their passions and lusts, should proceed from evil to evil. They have subdued shame, and imposed silence on their consciences; they have acquired a relish for sinful pleasures, and feel no uneasy apprehensions in regard to futurity; they must, therefore, wax worse and worse, contracting new guilt, and exposing themselves to a more dreadful condemnation.

Thus

Thus have I endeavoured not only to ascertain the fact, but to show why men proceed from evil to evil. It follows, from an impartial view of the subject, that we should be on our guard against the first temptations to sin, and even the smallest deviations from duty. This jealousy of themselves, this vigilance, this steady determination not to act against the dictates of conscience, and the conviction of their own minds, is particularly incumbent on those who have just entered life; they should give the most earnest heed to the counsel of the wise man; —“let thine eyes look right on, and thine eye-lids look straight before thee; ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established; turn not to the right hand nor to the left, remove thy foot from evil.”

To retain the tenderness of conscience is an object of infinite importance; be careful, then, to listen to its remonstrances, and to revere its counsels. Remember that its voice is the voice of God; attentive to that voice, if, by accident, you take a wrong step, you will be able to recover the path of virtue, and proceeding with new caution, you will finish your course with joy.

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Let shame conspire with conscience to preserve you from every deliberate transgression ; recollect that a good name is better than much riches ; and that the approbation of those who know how to distinguish merit, is not to be despised. Educated in the principles of the best and purest religion, do not make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience ; “ Cease, my son, to hear the instruction of those who would cause thee to err.” Persons, who have grown old in wickedness, “ hate the light, and will not come to it, lest their deeds should be reproved ;” but, as you are in the morning of life, and if you have wandered, cannot have wandered far, do you cherish a reverence for divine revelation, and let it guide your feet into the path of duty. “ The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul ;” the gospel of Christ is profitable for doctrine, reproof, and correction, is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among those who are sanctified. Whilst, therefore, you assent to its truth, and acknowledge its authority, you will have an example to follow, and the strongest motives to abandon a vicious course, and to return to your duty ; but, if you give up revelation, you arm the passions, and, at
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the same time, relinquish the only effectual means of defence.

These counsels cannot be unacceptable to those, who are aware of the progressive nature of sin, and have seen persons proceed from evil to evil ; to such I would earnestly recommend the subject of this discourse. Be deeply impressed with this momentous truth, that when you commit one offence, you know not how far you may depart from the right way. You may, before you are aware, be entangled and overcome ; and you may lose your liberty before you may be sensible that it is in danger. Suffer, therefore, the word of exhortation : To-day, whilst it is called to-day, hear the voice of God, and harden not your hearts. Before it is too late, break off your sins by righteousness ; otherwise, that sentence may be pronounced, “ he that is unjust, let him be unjust still : he that is filthy, let him be filthy still.”

To conclude :—whatever be neglected, do not neglect the means of religion, and the care of your own souls ; be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain. If unfaithful to yourselves, if addicted to the pursuits of sin, if regardless of the consequences, you will find that the wages of

sin are death, and that all, who sin against God, wrong their own souls. Hear instruction, therefore; be wise, and listen to the admonitions of the gospel: so will your repentance cover a multitude of sins, and your retreat from the paths of unrighteousness will save your souls alive.
Amen.

Sermon XVII.

THE PERIOD OF YOUTH THE ACCEPTED
TIME.

2 CORINTHIANS, vi. 2.

BEHOLD, NOW IS THE ACCEPTED TIME ; BEHOLD,
NOW IS THE DAY OF SALVATION !

THERE is a season and a time to every purpose under the heaven. There is a time to be born, and a time to die ; a time to gain, and a time to lose ; a time to break down, and a time to build up ; a time to acquire knowledge, and a time to forget ; a time for action, and a time for repose ; a time to form good habits, and a time when we may despair of any religious acquisitions ; a time, when we may correct the wickedness of our hearts, and a time, when it will be almost incorrigible ! Our inattention to these facts is one of the most fruitful sources

sources of human error : our worldly circumstances are often injured by this particular instance of folly. From the same cause our minds experience a heavier wrong ; but what is most to be lamented, is the ruin which we bring upon our souls by neglecting the accepted time, and trifling away the day of salvation.

Never was there a more fatal mistake, than the supposition, that the last dregs of life would serve for all the purposes of religion ; this is the delusion, to which so many will hereafter ascribe their ruin. It is this, which enables them to withstand the most affectionate addresses, the most solemn warnings, and the most earnest exhortations, which they meet with in the gospel. It is this, which blinds their eyes to the native charms of moral goodness ; and it is this, which fortifies them against the tormenting forebodings of future misery. They presume, that the gradual decays of nature will give reasonable notice of an approaching change ; and they have no doubt, that an expiring moment, consecrated to God, will compensate a whole life devoted to sin.

It is the intention of every vicious man, at some future period, to amend his ways. A secret dissatisfaction with his conduct will

will often find its way into his bosom ; not only his sober reason, but also his heart will tell him that all is not right : hence the work of reformation will always be in contemplation. Whatever his present conduct may be, yet he will cherish the idea, that, at some future time, his actions will bear the test ; and that he shall die a better man than he has lived. This infatuation is universal ; the youth very sensibly feels its influence ; and we perceive its effects on middle life, and even old age. Instead of actually beginning a course of reformation, the most advanced in years will be only *about* to reform.

To expose the danger and absurdity of such delays, I have called your attention to the words of the text ; they are the words of God, and were originally communicated by the prophet Isaiah. “ Thus saith the Lord, in an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee.” It is added by the apostle, “ *behold, now is the accepted time ; behold, now is the day of salvation.*”

These words contain a most interesting truth. That there is a season of merciful visitation, a day of grace, is pre-supposed in the text ; and that the present is that day

day and season, is emphatically asserted. To this remark I would call the special attention of my younger hearers ; they are particularly interested in it ; their course is but begun ; if they have erred and strayed from the right way, they can tread back the ground, over which they have incautiously wandered ; in respect to them, a retreat is not impracticable ; for which reason, they are to consider themselves most solemnly addressed in the following words, “ *behold, now is the accepted time ; behold, now is the day of salvation.*”

Every man, who believes the gospel, will acknowledge that we are designed for a future state of existence ; every one who reads it, will perceive, that our future condition may be happy or miserable ; and every one, who understands it, will admit, that something is to be done by us, in order to our final well-being. Let the scriptures be tortured ever so much, still they will speak this language. Whatever conclusion may be drawn from single texts, torn from their original connexion, and absurdly combined, still, the united testimony of divine revelation is in favour of moral virtue. Consult the sacred volume as you would any other
book,

book, and you will unavoidably perceive, that God is a moral governour ; that his benevolence is exercised with wisdom ; that the salvation of the gospel is a salvation as well from the reigning power, as the penal consequences of sin ; and that certain duties must be performed, and certain habits acquired, before there can be even a capacity for future happiness. If these are not christian truths, it is impossible to determine what deserves the name. We must despair of ever understanding the gospel, if it be merely a history of blessings purchased by Jesus Christ, without any intimation of the qualifications necessary for the enjoyment of those blessings, or the terms, on which they would be hereafter bestowed.

We read, in the sacred pages, not only of hearing, but doing the will of our Master ; we read of faith, repentance, and a persevering course of obedience ; and we find, in all parts of the inspired volume, the most liberal promises to them who forsake their sins, and sincerely endeavour to keep the commandments. These passages must have some meaning ; and what so obvious as that suggested above, namely, that we must be morally good, before we can be supremely happy !

Consider

Consider the state of things in the present world ; we are not continued in life without a prudent care of ourselves ; we must exert ourselves in order to have food to eat, and raiment to cover us ; the earth will not yield its increase, unless it be previously cultivated by human hands ; mental improvement must be the effect of mental application ; in short, scarcely any blessing in life can be obtained or secured, without some exertion on our part. And why should not the expected blessings of another world be bestowed on similar terms ? Why should it not be as requisite that we should take care of the soul as of the body ; that we should work out our eternal, as our temporal salvation ?

The necessity of taking measures for your future well-being must be admitted. The question now is, whether there can be a better time than the present for this momentous undertaking ? You will plead, that you are young ; that as you advance in years, you will naturally become more steady ; that the mortifications, and other evils of life, will drive you to religion for support and consolation ; that religion will set better on you, when you have made some progress in the business and knowledge of the world ; these, and similar

far excuses you will offer for declining an immediate attention to your everlasting interests ; but let me say, that “ *now is the accepted time, now the day of salvation.*” There never can be a more favourable season for religious improvements, than when the mind is most susceptible of serious impressions ; when the conscience is most tender ; when the sense of shame is most active ; and when there are the fewest impediments to remove in order to lay the foundation of virtue. These conspiring circumstances distinguish your period of life ; and it is for this reason, we recommend the morning of your days as the accepted time.

But a subject of such importance deserves a more particular discussion. Let me, then, observe, in the *First* place, that now is your time for the forming of good habits, because it may be done with more ease than at any future period. Impressions are easily made on the young mind ; and, with proper care, they may be retained. Besides, there are not, in your case, inveterate prejudices to be subdued, or vicious habits to be overcome, before you can be brought to a sense of religion. Habits are the work of time ; consequently those, which are of a ruinous nature,

ture, cannot be so formed in you, as to threaten your destruction. How much easier is it to build, where there is no rubbish to be removed ? How much easier is it to cultivate the earth, where there are no pernicious weeds to be extirpated ? How much easier to make ourselves masters of any art or science, where there is nothing previously to be unlearned ? This may be your case ; your minds may be so fair, your prejudices so few, you may be so unaccustomed to wicked practices, that, comparatively speaking, it may be very easy for you to adopt a virtuous course of behaviour.

Hitherto I have gone upon the most favourable supposition ; I have taken it for granted, that you have happily escaped the pollutions, which are in the world. But let us suppose, that you have been occasionally drawn away and enticed ; we will imagine, that you are not strangers to the follies and vices, which disgrace human nature ; still your recovery to virtue will be easily effected, if you instantly consider your ways : you have only stepped aside from the right course, consequently you may soon find the path with proper attention.

You remember the story of the prodigal son :

son : that story exhibits a very interesting scene, and affords a most useful lesson. A young man requested, and received of an indulgent parent, the portion of goods, which properly fell to him ; with this treasure he took his journey to a far country ; remote from a father's eye, he soon forgot the virtuous lessons, which he had received from his lips. The consequence was, that he formed infamous and criminal connexions, and dissipated his substance in riotous living ; poverty brought him to his senses ; and immediately, on coming to himself, he not only resolved to return to his parent and his duty, but actually abandoned the scenes of his guilt and misery ; he arose and came to his father.

In this story, the point before us is beautifully illustrated. I have said, that the young mind is susceptible of deep impressions ; and that persons, who have not been long familiar with sin, may be easily recovered. These remarks are certainly verified in the case of the prodigal ; his forlorn condition harrowed up his soul ; and his virtuous resolutions were no sooner formed than executed. This shows how attentive young persons should be to every admonition of conscience ; the moment

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ment they perceive their misconduct, is the proper time to reform ; every whisper of conscience is to this effect,—“ behold, now is the accepted time ; behold, now is the day of salvation.”

But, *Secondly* : that the season of youth is the time most favourable to religion, will further appear from this circumstance, that if persons do not attend to their duty in early life, the probability is, that they never will become christians. Habits of vice will become so inveterate, as, morally speaking, to be incorrigible. “ Can the Ethiopian, says the prophet, change his skin, or the leopard his spots ? then may they do good, who have been accustomed to do evil.” His remark is just ; habit is second nature ; the longer men accustom themselves to do wrong, the less sensible they will be of the obliquity of their conduct ; their heart will grow hard ; their conscience insensible ; and the moral powers will, at length, be so impaired, as to render their conversion an impossible thing.

At what period a sinner becomes irrecoverable, it is not for us to say. Some have asserted, that the habits of every man become fixed by the time he has numbered forty years. If this be the case,

case, men, who to that period have lived in a course of sin, can expect nothing but certain perdition. This opinion has not been capriciously advanced, but is founded on a careful examination of human nature, and a strict attention to matters of fact. I would hope, however, that the space for repentance and reformation is not confined to such bounds ; but, the possibility that this representation of things may be true, should dispose us all to serious consideration.

This is certain, that after a number of years has passed in sin, it is highly improbable, that a reformation should take place ; such instances are not furnished by the age in which we live ; we do not find men suddenly forsake their evil practices, and betake themselves to a course of virtue : so far from it, the children of disobedience wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. According to the time spent in doing wrong, they become easy in such a course ; and is it probable, that when the commands of God have lost their authority, conscience its sensibility, and shame its influence, old habits will be overcome, and new ones formed ? It is irrational, to the last degree, to entertain such a thought.

Once more ; the particular aid, which young persons have reason to expect, and the extraordinary progress, which they may probably make in the course of life, is a further proof that the morning of their days is the accepted time, and the day of salvation. God will undoubtedly assist those, who sincerely endeavour to know him betimes, and to begin a course of duty as soon as they are able to discern what their duty is. The case speaks for itself ; youthful piety is most amiable in the eyes of God ; and if so, he will assuredly give every encouragement to those, whose ambition it is, as they grow in years, to grow in favour both with God and man.

And what must be their moral attainments, should they arrive at old age ? What habits must they acquire ? What virtues must they possess ? With what excellencies must they be adorned ? In a religious view, how must they shine ? What a foundation must they have laid for the services and entertainments, the glories and delights of the heavenly world ? It is plain, by an early attention to religion, they have become qualified for its future joys ; and not only so, but for those joys in their highest degree.

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Many other arguments might be offered in support of the point before us ; but your own reflections will supersede the necessity, on my part, of being more particular. You must be sensible, that, so far as religion is concerned, your period of life has advantages over all others : your work may be begun and prosecuted with comparative ease ; you may hope for large communications of aid from above ; and you have the prospect of superiour attainments, and a superiour reward. On the other hand, should you neglect the early part of life, you have reason to apprehend the worst consequences. Setting out wrong at first, you must be convinced, that every step will carry you farther from your duty, and every moment, whilst it is delayed, increase the difficulty of your return.

Apprized of these things, remember the Creator, and reverence his authority, now in the days of your youth ; give him your hearts, before any other object has taken their possession ; behold, now is the time to lay a sure foundation for honour, peace, and usefulness in the world ; now is the time to cultivate good principles, and to acquire good habits ; now is the time to store your minds with religious truths,

truths, to subject yourselves to the gospel, and to conform to the bright example of its Author ; now is the time to make that choice, and to pursue that course, which must terminate in joy unspeakable and full of glory : if you lose this opportunity, another may not offer. Vain and most presumptuous is it to say, a future period will be more convenient. Are you sure of arriving at that period ? Have you a year, a day, or even an hour at your disposal ? You know not what a moment will bring forth ; nothing can be more uncertain than the period of your probation ; so many dangers beset us, and to so many accidents are we exposed, that we may well say, “ man knoweth not his time.”

Beware then of delaying that which must be done, before you can be happy ; trust not to a more convenient season. If you have hitherto acted an inconsiderate part, now is the time to correct your faults, and prevent the consequences. If you have been irreverent in your conversation, and licentious in your behaviour, now is the time to check so degrading a propensity. If you have been seduced into the paths of forbidden pleasure, now is the time to turn from them, and re-
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gain the path of sober virtue. Do you contemplate a reformation of manners? Now is the time to begin the important work. Do you seriously intend to make a profession of religion? Make that profession now. What our Saviour once said to Judas on another occasion, I would say to you,—“what thou doest, do quickly.” There is no time to be lost; the whole period of human life is but a tale that is told. In what terms, then, shall we describe that period, in which we may sow the seeds of virtue, and form those habits, which constitute the life of God in the soul.

There is every reason for an immediate attention to our eternal interests. We are exhorted, we are conjured, to consider the things which belong to our peace, before they are hidden from our eyes. The tender mercies of God, the dying love of our Redeemer, the precious promises, and awful threatenings of the gospel, the joys of heaven, and the horrors of the infernal world, are all set before us as inducements to forsake our sins, and to live reasonable creatures. Let not these considerations be overlooked; they merit our attention; the young, in particular, should give earnest heed

heed to these arguments in favour of practical religion ; and every man, who retains a moral faculty, should be convinced by them of the absolute necessity of doing, without delay, what his hands find to do.

Would to God it were possible to realize the value of the present moment ! Would to God we had a just idea of the deceitfulness of sin ! Oh that we could ascend to heaven, and be witnesses of the exquisite felicity of the righteous ! Oh that we could penetrate the blackness of darkness, and be spectators of the shame and misery of the ungodly ! Oh that we could trace things to their consequences, and see how naturally, and how necessarily, our present conduct must determine our future condition ! Could we contemplate our actions in all their connexions, we should most assuredly make haste, and delay not to keep the commandments. “ I love them, who love me, and those, who seek me early shall find me,” are words which ought to make a lasting impression on our minds ; could we feel the whole force of this assurance, religion would never want friends among young persons ; youthful folly, vanity, and dissipation would be unknown ; but the
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rising generation would be an ornament to human nature ; and growing in years, would grow in favour with God and man. *Amen.*





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